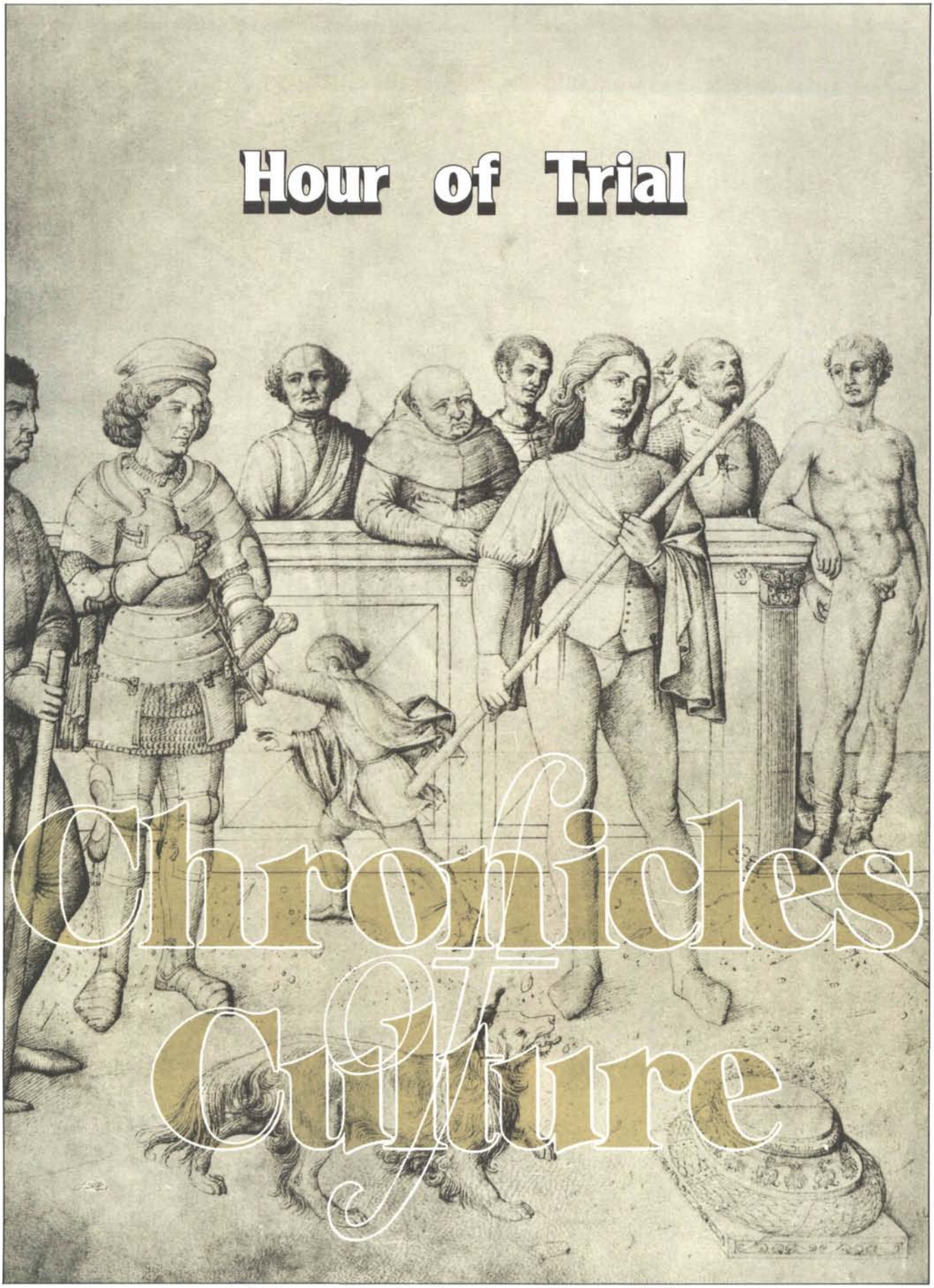
Hour of Trial



Chronicles Of Culture

Volume 4, Number 1, January/February 1980

LICENSED TO CWZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contents

4 Editor's Comment — Leopold Tyrmand

Liberal Culture

7 The Chambers of a Communist Conscience—The *Trib* on Incest—Princeton Tales

Opinions & Views

8 *La Ronde,* or the Dance of Labels — Paul Gottfried
—Peter Steinfels: *The Neoconservatives*

10 Conventional Unconventionality & Obedient Rebellion — Earl Hilton
—John Barth: *Letters*

12 The Vicissitudes of Effect and Style — Edward J. Walsh
—Tom Wolfe: *The Right Stuff*

14 Political Literariness — Dain A. Trafton
—V. S. Naipaul: *A Bend in the River*
—Kurt Vonnegut: *Jailbird*

16 Lawful Killing in the Barbaric Present — Clarence B. Carson
—Stephen H. Gettinger: *Sentenced to Die*

18 Some Very Special Truths — Erich Eichman
—Doris Grumbach: *Chamber Music*

21 Timelessness and the Itch of Modernism — Christopher Manion
—James Hitchcock: *Catholicism & Modernity*

24 Between Two Chairs and into Phonyland — Lev Navrozov
—Irwin Shaw: *The Top of the Hill*

26 For the Intelligent Noneconomist — William E. Cage
—George Reisman: *The Government Against the Economy*

28 Co-opting the Beat Generation — Gordon M. Pradl
—Dennis McNally: *Desolate Angel*

30 Perfectly Awful — Joseph Schwartz
—J. P. Donleavy: *Schultz*

Commendables

32 A Convincing *Reglement des Comptes: The Ghost Writer*
Mr. Dimitrov of Bulgaria: *Dimitrov of Bulgaria*

Waste of Money

32 The Sharks: *The Brethren: Inside the Supreme Court*

Screen

33 A Big Bang and Small Change — Eric Shapearo
—*Apocalypse Now*
—*Starting Over*
—*10*
—*Yanks*
—*Le Cage aux Folles*

Music

35 Building Inspectors and Criticism of Music — Tom Bethell
—Andrew Porter: *Music of Three Seasons: 1974-1977*

36 Keeping Time with the CLU and Other Thoughts — Douglas A. Ramsey

Correspondence

38 Letter from London: Theatre — Francis Donahue

The American Proscenium

40 Rock Music in Cincinnati

41 Polish Joke

Journalism

41 The *Lincoln Review* — Allan C. Brownfeld

42 Antitoxin

Polemics & Exchanges

42 The ACLU and the Conservative Impulse — Henry L. Mason III

Vol. 3, No. 5 September/October 1979
Normalcy—Our Sixth Sense

Vol. 3, No. 6 November/December 1979
Two Cultures

Tyrmand: Editor's Comment; Navrozov on Styron *(Sophie's Choice)*; Trafton on Snow *(The Realists)*; Schwartz on Amis *(Jake's Thing)*; Hitchcock on Gans *(Deciding What's News)*; Klute on Pilon *(Notes from the Other Side of Night)*; Walsh on O'Brien *(Going after Cacciato)*; Gottfried on Gouldner and Mansfield *(The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class, The Spirit of Liberalism)*; Scott on Rogge *(Can Capitalism Survive?)*; Levine on Hackett, et al. *(The Third World War)*; Metzger on Teller *(Energy from Heaven and Earth)*; Gordon on Hessen *(In Defense of the Corporation)*; Commendables; In Focus; Waste of Money; Stage; Screen; Music; Art; Correspondence; The American Proscenium; Journalism; Liberal Culture.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chronicles of Culture

Volume 4, Number 1 January/February 1980

Hour of Trial

Chronicles of Culture is published bimonthly by the Rockford College Institute, 5050 East State Street, Rockford, Illinois 61101; Director: John Howard; Editor: Leopold Tyrmand; Publishing Manager: Richard A. Vaughan; Editorial Assistant: Becki Klute; Printed by Wilson-Hall Co.; Cover: "Spettatori che Assistono ad un Torneo" by Jacopo Bellini (1424-1470), from the MacLeish Collection, The Rare Print Cabinet, Rockford College Library; Original vignette by Warren Chappell.

ISSN: 0163-1187

The opinions expressed in the publications of the Rockford College Institute do not necessarily reflect the policies or judgments of Rockford College.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editor's Comment

We write these words on the 60th day of the calamity and humiliation known as the Iranian crisis. This crisis seems to us to be more an hour of trial whose magnitude and complexity transcend the dilemmas of Korea and Vietnam. The rudiments of a livable planet are involved; the world order which may emerge from our lack of resolve, or inconsistency, in defense of the fundamentals could prove lethal to all we are and all we wish to be. If we do not learn that lesson *now,* the ultimate fight for survival may follow, one whose outcome is hard to predict. Thus, let us review what these events have already taught us, here in Rockford, Illinois, and how we see and interpret them.

Iran has shown clearly who America's most bloodthirsty, implacable, fanatical, cruel, and dangerous enemy really is. It is the relatively new Fifth International of cosmopolitan terrorism, allied with the Soviet Union. In spite of the circumstance that it has been in the news for nearly thirty years, we know little about it. To understand it better, we must clarify who the people of this faith and movement are, what they want, and why America is both their prime target and the kingpin of their success.

There's a bizarre irony in the fact that cosmopolitan terrorism has, in a sense, gained a good deal of its impetus from the American culture, or rather from its degenerative symptoms. The cosmopolitan terrorist, whatever his ideological vehicle—nationalism, Marxism, or any modern version of anarchism—draws his dialectics and rhetoric from the left-liberal "wisdom" so deeply entrenched in the American academia since the 60's, from the radical "alternative" publications which have proliferated during the last decade, from the centers and outlets of the American procommunist and "liberationist" intellectuality. Like the pathetic American "revolutionist" of the 60's, the cosmopolitan terrorist is almost never a son of the working classes; he is almost always from an affluent background—be it in Italy, West Germany, the Middle East, Japan. He routinely speaks excellent English, which has been polished at American universities, often on grants financed by American taxpayers. His martial music is Woodstock rock. He sports Levis, Army-Navy surplus fatigues, sneakers, printed T-shirts, beards, and hairdos as prescribed by *Village Voice, Mother Jones,* and the Young Set Boutique at Bloomingdale's. All this makes him look and sound like the phony American nonconformist of the last decade, whom *Time* and CBS so frantically promoted in order to endear him to the average American mind. However, as the supreme token of fashion, he flaunts the Kalashnikov automatic rifle—and both the symbolism and the reality of this gesture are the point at which some heinous, even deadly, political consequences begin.

It's also at this point that the American civilization begins to facilitate cosmopolitan terrorism with a perverse, spooky efficiency. The American media, with their fraudulent motto, "the people's right to know," their insatiable sensationalism, and their inherent morbid liberalism, implement the terrorist's prosperity—just like the vociferous subculture of the 60's was realizable only through the American press's support of its alleged "moral superiority." The cosmopolitan terrorist learned early that guerrilla action has strategic and tactical worth only when it is amplified with the help of NBC or ABC news crews. Since the American media programmatically refuse to promote any value judgment other than the liberal one, over the years they have presented the cosmopolitan terrorist to the confused American public as a "student-rebel," "freedom fighter," "ideological militant"—often with warm sympathy, bogus "understanding," with an "objectivity" that obviously amounts to benign approbation. Why the American media—for so long and with such ruthless stupidity—have forged the image of the cosmopolitan terrorist as the most colorful occurrence of our time, remains murky. Watching CBS's Mike Wallace reverently address Khomeini as "Imam" —which means "divinely inspired" according to Shiite tradition—makes the price we pay for the American media's cynicism painfully visible.

That a superior culture nourishes its fiercest violators and destroyers is nothing new: Algerian theorists of murder and Mau-Mau tacticians acquired their political savvy, credos, and emotionalities from the Sorbonne and Oxford. Only after it was eliminated was colonialism revealed to be an agent of progress, whose demise without prior reform may have been a mistake. The anti-Americanism of the current cosmopolitan terrorism is another matter. It is an enigmatic affair, rooted more in neuroses and self-hatred than in any sociopolitical conception. The modern cosmopolitan terrorist, alienated from the values and aspirations of the working and middle classes of Italy, Germany, even Ireland, sees America as the strongest and freest bulwark of practical humanity, one which can most effectively defend itself from his assaults, and support societies against him. The American systemic order remains authentic, stable, solidly embraced by the citizens, and it is constantly evolving toward greater justice, equality, and respect for the common man; American social fairness is still unintimidated, robust, uncorrupted, an object of envy to the rest of the world. Countless simple people in the terrorist's own country still look up to America as an Eden where everyone wants to live. Liberty and people's power are still genuine features of life here, democracy is a reality, the free-enterprise system has a veritable support by the general consensus. To assert himself, the cosmopolitan terrorist must strike out at America, the most formidable opponent of his totalitarian, elitist, dastardly principle of murdering innocents in order to superimpose his political will on those who do not want it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When, where, and how cosmopolitan terrorism became the client of the Soviet Union is not easy to generalize. Actually, most of the terrorist movements consider the communist state an enemy, and with good reason. Nonetheless, an alliance has been concluded. The cosmopolitan terrorist, whenever he acts against the U.S., Israel, Western Europe, prosperous Japan, or just peace and stability around the noncommunist world, he does it on behalf of Russia. He gets his training in those "institutes of ideological warfare" in Ulyanovsk or Minsk, where the KGB introduces him to the arts of assassination, sabotage, bombing, subversion, interrogating and torturing prisoners—all in keeping with the latest Soviet achievements and research in the subjugation and elimination of people. That the Teheran "students" are graduates of such an institution of Soviet higher learning is obvious to anyone with an unprejudiced eye. Their skills at isolating the American hostages from one another, at meticulously planning propaganda lies about their condition, at torturing them without brutality by "just" having them tied to a chair for days and nights, and forcing them to assure the world that they are "well treated," while decomposing their will to resist and dividing them along racial or sexual differentiations—all these indicate the most refined Soviet techniques. Is there still anyone in the world, besides the American liberal, who believes that captives extoll their captors without coercion? The captors of 50 Americans are political thugs from an ignominious school of human abasement invented by the communists in Russia. Why the American press gratifies them with the label "students" at a time when semantics is promotion, is incomprehensible and reprehensible.

The American media seem to be unable to grasp that the cosmopolitan terrorist's ultimate goal is the humiliation of America. This seems rather insubstantial for a political objective, but it makes sense in an era of image as substance. It's the only, the best, way to reassert the terrorist's *Weltanschauung:* our denigration is his *raison d'être.* Unlike a Marxist, he does not strive for economic retribution or class vengeance; America does not exploit Iran, but enriches it. He doesn't attempt to disarm America politically or militarily —as may intend his Russian ally, who has a realistic chance to do just that. His only victory, then, is possible through debasing, befouling, and trampling American glory—with the help of the American ethos and institutions, America's reluctance to impose her will on others, American respect for law and humanness. This is why Prof. Schlesinger's proposal to let the terrorists know that we understand their ends and wishes was so silly: Mr. Schlesinger assumed that once we had explained to them that we sympathized with their concerns, they would let the hostages go. I can imagine their belly laugh. As ever, the American liberal thinks and behaves like a "useful idiot"—as Stalin used to call him.

* * *

Islam, and Arabic societies, have become a fertile hotbed of cosmopolitan terrorism. This truth antedates the Iranian crisis. The most ferocious and random political terrors in modern times made their debut in Algeria in the 1950's. Since then, the Arab, particularly the PLO commando, has become a synonym for barbarism, atrocity, inhumanity. Now Iran, a non-Arabic but Moslem nation, adds to this picture an utter contempt for all norms, or rationales, evolved during the millennia, for civil intercourse between peoples, nations, societies, countries, states.

Not long ago, we wrote in *The Rockford Papers* that two factors would determine the relationship between the West and Islam: first, the smoldering passion for revenge against Christianity for all that happened after the battle of Lepanto, which is now possible thanks to the oil weapon; second, the susceptibility of the Moslem world to accommodation with the totalitarian dregs of the Judeo-Christian civilization, like nazism and communism. The Moslem syncretism is inexplicable: the Islamic fundamentalist, Qaddafi, is Moscow's most trusted henchman in the Mediterranean, and the wealthiest protector of cosmopolitan terrorism—three disparate aspects of a virulent anti-Americanism and anti-freedom are perfectly converged in one personality. The PLO operates with Soviet expertise and equipment. Moslem Afghanistan is being crushed by the Russians, who have also

Philosophy in America

"O philosophy, thou guide of life, O thou explorer of virtue and expeller of vice!"

—Cicero, 45 B.C.

"In LA, or New York, I'd be a pornographer; here I'm a philosopher."

So spake a certain Dr. Mike Sered. "Here" means Chicago. What gives Dr. Sered the status of successor to Descartes and Husserl in Chicago? He edits a sex magazine (together with his wife) and organizes a yearly Life Styles Expo. He has been working on defining "mind-styles . . . alternative to the Judeo-Christian way of finding spirituality," and, after a giant intellectual effort, he has found them in things like mate swapping, surrogate sex therapy, and institutions once called brothels, but which now are called "swingers' clubs" by Dr. Sered's devout disciples. The *Chicago Tribune* gave Dr. Sered and his Expo fantastic publicity. Which makes us sense that perhaps he's right to consider himself a philosopher in Chicago. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

provided the Teheran "students" with arms, instruction, handbooks of subversion and invigilation. The Islamic community within the Soviet Union is the only religious group which seems to cooperate smoothly with the Soviet regime.

Such an abyss of confusion may spell a catastrophe. It is a source of incoherent hatred toward us as successors to the medieval Crusaders and colonialists; the Islamic orthodoxy sees in us the rottenness of agnosticism; Islamic radicals see us as devilish imperialists. Both perceive us as a more loathsome menace than Marxism. Arab states which dabble in other concepts, like Saudi Arabia, have about as much political stability as the fallen Shah's regime: their ideological allegiance to us is based on the intellectual discourse between tribal chieftains and Exxon executives. Afghan bellicosity cannot be considered an offshoot of a congruent Moslem will, let alone strategy, in resisting communism. "What's occurring in the Middle East has nothing to do with the Israel-Arab conflict," wrote a renowned expert recently in the *Wall Street Journal.* "The world faces the dangers inherent in the impact of the 20th century, coupled with untold wealth, on medieval societies." In other words, we have on our hands a combination of genuine economic power and fanaticism. This unique mixture, perhaps never seen before in history, has produced a cabal which is emotionally opposed to us, blind in its outbursts, easily manipulated by our most vituperative enemy, puissantly explosive, and wishes nothing but to see us on our knees, even if it means peril to itself. The cosmopolitan terrorist, who in West Asia recruits mainly from the Moslem-Arab intelligentsia, is cognizant of the intricacies of his own region. He has no trouble in pledging subservience simultaneously to social progress and Islamic fiendishness, to anti-imperialism and Moscow; this zealous flexibility makes him the factual ruler of religious rabble-rousers, and if we have any further doubts as to who is in charge in Teheran—the Ayatollah or the "students"—we are deluding ourselves.

The terrorist is buoyant and elated these days; everything is working for him and against us. Even our inept president —doctrinaire, narrow-minded, and hypocritically good-natured—seems to do everything he can to make things go the terrorist's way. The president's brother is chummy with Libyan terrorists; the president himself, and his closest advisers, consider the PLO a partner in pacifying the world—and that's on the record.

* * *

Our president, though he was elected to office because he promised different kinds of goodies, once there, began to implement the so-called McGovern foreign policy. It's a policy based on the gut feeling that America is the major source of the world's depravity. American capitalism, American *raison d'etat,* and American global functions—according to the McGovernites whom our president put into positions of power—are evil by nature, by the mere circumstance of being American. Thus, the logical inference is that in order to reduce American corruption, the best thing would be to reduce the role, authority, and influence of America to that of Namibia.

People know a death wish when they see one. The disgusting conduct of our allies may, therefore, be somehow justified. They have concluded that America neither comprehends the situation, nor is able to cope with it. They have betrayed us by their silence, by their lack of spontaneous condemnation of the most blatant offense against international order since Hitler and Stalin. Countries that we saved from degradation after their defeat at our hands, and to which we offered, instead, a friendship that made them wealthy, other countries that we saved from famine and revolution—they all have abandoned us in the hour of trial. There will be plenty of talk, later, about their so-called quiet diplomacy behind the scenes and their alleged sympathy. This is not what is needed. What is needed is a demonstration of factual and instrumental solidarity—instant ideological alignment and political commitment which would let the other side know where we *all* stand during an emergency. This has not occurred. And the United Nations reluctantly admonished the oppressors, two months too late; that is, it put up a squalid puppet show—once again with our money.

Perhaps it is hard to blame our "allies" for their attitude when they can read in the newspapers that our own politico-ideological dwarfs are protesting against our government's measures to deal with 50,000 Iranians, many of whom demonstrated in *our* streets in support of aggression and terror perpetrated against *us* in *their* country. A German or Frenchman, reading that a U.S. judge had barred proceedings against Iranians on the grounds that our government had "singled them out for investigation," must conclude that it's not healthy to be on the side of people who obviously wish to perish. According to this judge's verdict, we are not permitted even to distinguish between a good Iranian and a bad one, while their "singling" us out for abuse seems perfectly all right. Besides that, the FBI has announced that it is unable to locate all the Iranians in the country, and has admitted that it does not know their exact number (50,000 or maybe 85,000?). We can only imagine the delighted grin of a cosmopolitan terrorist in Teheran, Paris, or on scholarship in Gorky, U.S.S.R., when he learns how nicely he can be protected by current interpretations of the U.S. Constitution.

For the last 30 years, the American liberals, who are in charge of America's public opinion and education, have been bewildering this society by claiming that the grievances of Guatemalans, Cubans, Chileans, Nicaraguans, Vietnamese, Angolans, Rhodesians, etc. are best represented by totalitarians tutored by Lenin, Marcuse, Guevara, and Fanon. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

American liberal of the Andrew Young brand openly and insistently wants to assist power-hungry political hoodlums all over the Third World: he not only wants tolerance and help for them but also association with them, and is pushing our country toward some rather smelly friendships. The American liberal has refused to listen to the arguments of Chileans or Israelis or black Rhodesians who want democracy rather than Marxism. What the American liberal wants in foreign policy is the instant redress of both real and imaginary wrongs, or the revenge of his own shallow and misguided idealism. So he objectively supports the PLO assassin, the Irish thug, the West German upper-class political vampire, even if he haltingly condemns their methods. Consequently, the liberal has legitimized every Soviet political intrigue, conquest, lie, subversion, corruption. By now, it's an old story. The East Europeans have been repeating it for 35 years, the Russians for a decade. Now come the boat people, next we'll have the Afghans, and on and on—while the American liberal learns nothing and slowly squanders our chances for survival.

* * *

By the time we finished this editorial the mess had become cosmic—Russia had invaded Afghanistan. What the liberals of the *Nation's* stripe will do with this news, I don't know; probably, they'll declare that in spite of something that *looks* like an invasion, the Soviet storm troopers will bring progress to the Afghans, who are reactionary religionists who don't know what's good for them. However, never before has the world witnessed so clearly the anatomy of Soviet cynicism and political criminality. We who have been nonliberals since the end of World War II, have always claimed that *whatever* the Soviets say is a cynical, criminal lie, but the *Nation's* staff accused us of cold-war bigotry. Is the ultimate proof of Soviet wickedness going to change the gist of the Carter-McGovern U.S. foreign policy? Hard to say. After all, neither Carter, nor Hodding Carter, has ever mentioned that those who are holding American hostages in Teheran are Soviet vassals, tools, weapons. The Russian embassies in Moslem countries appear serenely unconcerned with Moslem "wrath," while Russian soldiers are massacring Moslems just around the corner. The Russian embassies have nothing to fear—they are well protected by the PLO, Mujeheddins, Fedayeen, and all those "idealists" with whom Mr. Carter is so eager to negotiate. Such negotiations will be the supreme triumph for America's enemies.

—Leopold Tyrmand

Since Chronicles of Culture *is a bimonthly, an editorial subject which has been announced in advance may be superseded by a more topical one. Hence, the issue entitled "The Haves, Have-nots and Have-littles" will appear later this year.*

Liberal Culture

The Chambers of a Communist Conscience

Anthony Blunt, English aristocrat and Soviet spy, declared to the British public on the occasion of his exposure that in providing Moscow with his country's military secrets, ". . . I haven't betrayed my conscience."

What an extraordinarily complex thing a conscience can be. At the time that Blunt and two other British homosexuals were giving their allegiance and Britain's defense secrets to Soviet Russia, in that idealistic nation the flimsiest allegation of homosexual activity could cause one to perish in a gulag or be tortured in KGB prisons for this despised bourgeois failing, repellent to any true-blue, robust proletarian. Some kind of functional conscience . . .

The Trib *on Incest*

An effusively friendly profile of Italian film director Bertolucci, author of *Luna,* a movie recommending incest as a help in bringing up difficult adolescents, concludes in the *Chicago Tribune* with:

> "He also can be seen as a talented filmmaker, rich with original and unconventional ideas. He enjoys arousing strong reactions, even controversy, with his works and has no regrets about upsetting reactionaries in the process."

Reactionaries? Who does the *Trib* have in mind?

Princeton Tales

The old Chaucerian spirit is alive and well at Princeton University, thanks to the rise of an uncompromising feminism in its lovely halls. Ms. Lila Karp, the head (?) of Princeton's Women's Center, announced in an interview given to the *Prospect,* a Princeton newsletter:

> "When the male consciousness raising groups get together with the women, *it's not going to be for a social* evening where we bring men in so we can objectify their bodies four hours later. That's not our intent. We really want to have a dialogue. If sex follows, that's terrific."

Ah, that ancient, (conservative?) irresistible urge! . . . □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

La Ronde, or the Dance of Labels

Peter Steinfels: *The Neoconservatives: Men Who Are Changing America's Politics;* Simon & Schuster; New York.

by Paul Gottfried

One of the most frustrating situations for modern traditionalists is that the political spectrum and the thrust of topical issues are always moving away from them. The left not only sets the agenda for its own discussion, but, even more significantly, determines that of its opponents. Thus American conservatives, by and large, avoid any argument against job quotas for women which would focus on traditional feminine roles in the family. The characteristic conservative response to affirmative action has been to appeal to individual rights and equal opportunity principles. Although neither stand should be considered exclusively leftist, conservative politicians and publicists, in this instance as in others, have shied away from debating social policy from a firmly defined traditionalist standpoint.

On affirmative action they have simply repaired to those slogans that liberal democrats used to defend the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which was—if one recalls—to provide all Americans with freedom from economic discrimination. Nor was it simply "bad public relations" that made Goldwater sound extreme in 1964 for expressing an impassioned commitment to freedom and anticommunism, a position which Kennedy had proclaimed to ecstatic journalists in his inaugural address only four years earlier. In the early sixties America, under the impact of a radicalized intelligentsia and growing welfare bureaucracy, veered sharply to the left and, in the process, forced the right to "adjust."

It has sometimes occurred to me, as a historian, that conservatives tend to raise their banners on abandoned leftist positions. If the European left cannot resist the "totalitarian temptation" to flirt with the communists, then the right has an equally obstinate *idée fixe:* pouncing upon discarded leftist slogans and proclaiming them as its own. I believe *The Neoconservatives* will aid in this process by giving rightist accreditation to a set of stimulating social democrats whom many conservatives properly admire. Who, after all, would deny that the American intellectual right has in recent years drawn polemical ammunition from the neoconservative publications, *Public Interest* and *Commentary,* whose editors and contributors have, moreover, been lionized at numerous conservative gatherings? Steinfels treats about a half dozen of these neoconservatives and devotes the greatest attention to Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, and D. P. Moynihan. In fact, the list can be greatly expanded to include kindred personalities only marginally mentioned in the text—e.g., Walter Berns and Michael Novak.

This list to which I am referring would encompass moderate leftists who in Europe might until recently have been called social democrats. All of these neoconservatives support the welfare state; and more than a few—e.g., Bell and Novak—still describe themselves as socialists or social democrats. Steinfels admits that the neoconservative position emerged "as an antibody on the left" and was intended as a counterweight "to the excesses of the new left and counterculture." Nonetheless, although acknowledging the leftist origin of the neoconservative challenge to trendy liberalism, Steinfels would have us believe that neoconservatism has by now become the "legitimating and lubricating ideology of an oligarchic America."

What he means by this is that some alleged neoconservatives, most notably Irving Kristol, have defended "democratic capitalism" against new left redistributionist schemes. And yet, Kristol's supposed ally on the right, Daniel Bell, persistently calls himself a socialist. Bell and Nathan Glazer, another neoconservative, both actively campaigned for George McGovern in 1972. D. P. Moynihan and Seymour Lipset, two more of Steinfels's neoconservatives, remain strongly committed to a mixed economy. Lipset has in fact lectured to conservative audiences on the virtues of organized labor and against the Republican Party's supposed pandering to greedy businessmen.

Although conservatives may be heartened by Moynihan's attacks on communist tyrannies and by Bell's critical remarks on the adversary culture, and while they may consult *Commentary* for arguments in fighting SALT II and study *Public Interest* for the gloomy

"*The Neoconservatives* deserves to be taken seriously."
—*New Leader*

"Mr. Steinfels's principal mistake, it seems to me, is taking his subjects too seriously."
—*New York Times Book Review*

"[Steinfels] may only be speculating, but it sounds like a warning to me."
—Peter S. Prescott
Newsweek

"Steinfels may take his neoconservatives a trifle too seriously."
—*Nation*

Dr. Gottfried teaches history at Rockford College.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

effects of minority quotas, an obvious political demarcation, nonetheless, exists between the two camps. For conservatives, especially traditionalists like myself, the new left and its liberal imitators represent more than a mere wart on the idea structure that the left has erected. Cultural nihilism, leveling egalitarianism, and self-mortifying attachment to the cult of the downtrodden have all fueled the leftist struggle against privilege and traditional social values. Although admittedly the modern left has sometimes attached itself to good causes—e.g., intermittently to antifascism and to the social improvement of American Negroes—neither the leveling impulse nor revulsion for the dominant culture has ever been missing from its members. The condemnation of white America as racist was a characteristic liberal attitude of my youth. Nor is it remarkable that social, artistic, and sexual experimenters have all gravitated in modern Europe to the communist and socialist parties. The left by its nature is the despiser of both tradition and cultural permanence. Obviously some neoconservatives would like to have their ideological cake and eat it at the same time. Bell, for example, insists on making distinctions among the polity, the economy, and culture. Thus while he advocates economic socialism and political civil liberties, he also defends moral order and artistic restraint as a cultural critic. Yet, as Steinfels properly points out, the disjunction that Bell makes is ultimately indefensible. The support Bell gave to Senator McGovern entailed not only an economic choice in favor of material redistribution. His decision also carried cultural, or countercultural, implications, much as the dedication to political libertarianism signifies a choice of cultural values. The three spheres that Bell wishes to keep separate are indissolubly related, but to accept this relatedness might spell the end of neoconservatism: that is, cause its submergence into the more traditional right.

Steinfels repeatedly notes a certain "tough-mindedness" on the part of neoconservative critics. They delight in exposing the sentimentality of the radical left and pile up statistical research to expose the inadequacies of liberal social programs. Yet, what he ignores is the continuing relationship of many neoconservatives to the very left which they attack. For example, Nathan Glazer actively supported the McGovern campaign after having published blistering attacks on minority quotas and busing for integration. Although his candidate in the presidential race took far more distasteful stands on both these issues than did the Nixon administration, Glazer put aside his scruples to campaign for McGovern. According to his later comments, McGovern would have ended the war quickly without being able to implement any radical redistributionist ideas. In an essay published the same year, however, Glazer furnished a far more plausible explanation for his political position. As the descendant of Jewish immigrants, he still considered the Democrats a congenial party of the left which fought against prejudice and in favor of social justice. Never mind that Glazer's own research gave the lie to both these contentions, that the Democrats were by now the party of fat-cat bureaucrats and their hangers-on, or that the left was condoning Third World anti-Semitism while demanding social quotas for jobs in universities and industries. Apparently Jean-Francois Revel's *Myth of the Left* still thrives among some neoconservatives.

Steinfels understandably does not quote that extensive literature which Lipset, Bell, and Glazer have produced to outline their views on right-wing dangers. All three figures, especially Lipset, have devoted more energy to exposing nativist and fundamentalist threats to American social progress than to defending oligarchies or denouncing hippies. One might note that Steinfels's flaming anticommunist Senator Moynihan has habitually voted with the liberals on defense issues and on economic policies. At least half the editorial staff of Steinfels's journalistic *bête noire, Commentary,* rejected Gerald Ford as excessively conservative, and cast their lot with his more liberal opponent in the 1976 presidential race. Finally, that supposed monster of reaction, Irving Kristol, editorialized in the *Wall Street Journal* in favor of that "prudent conservative" Gerald Ford and against the supposedly impetuous and regressive Ronald Reagan.

In my opinion, Steinfels not only engages in rhetorical overkill by calling his subjects reactionary, he also oversimplifies their problematic connection to both the left and the right. Most neoconservatives hold transitional positions. Sentimentally and practically they remain allied to the American moderate left; and though that position has been increasingly shaped by the more radical left (note the political difference between J.F.K. and his ne'er-do-well brother), most neoconservatives have stayed Democrats or even socialists while grumbling. In fact, as Steinfels remarks, their polemical activities grew out of their relationship with others on the intellectual left. And as the price of maintaining that tie, the same group continues to perform the rituals of denouncing enemies on the right while rallying to the candidates of their leftward drifting national party.

Nonetheless, the neoconservatives take cultural stands and raise political issues to which only the right will currently listen. Perhaps Steinfels correctly attributes to them the propagation of a "serious conservatism," but without acknowledging the accidental nature of this achievement for at least some of his subjects. Many neoconservatives, in clinging to unrealistic political alliances, have come to resemble wayward missionaries who swill with drunkards in order to reform them. Some neoconservatives—or neoliberals as they prefer to be called—repeatedly assert that corporate capitalism is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

utterly incompatible with traditional moral and social values. Whatever the merits of this analysis, it seems unlikely that the McGovern-Kennedy coalition of feminists, abortion advocates, and counterculture intellectuals can currently outbid the right in accommodating traditionalists. As Irving Kristol and Michael Novak have realized, the capitalist right is the only place where traditional morality and religion are taken at all seriously in contemporary American politics.

The most thoughtful of Steinfels's neoconservatives, Irving Kristol, has rejected an already partly dated classification by declaring himself *tout simplement* a conservative. Kristol now advocates a "conservative welfare state" that combines capitalist productivity with republican virtues. Some of his critics have properly noted the utopian aspect of this project. As M. Stanton Evans has observed, Kristol's unwarranted premise is that the welfare state can be made to reverse its previous record of impeding efficiency while expressing antitraditional impulses. Although this critical observation may be correct, it must not cause us to lose sight of that profound cultural concern basic to Kristol's proposal. In an age of convenient politics and blurred distinctions—when traditionalists and libertarians try to bury their differences on the right, and when some neoconservatives still doggedly pursue Democratic bandwagons on the left—Kristol has sounded a defiant call for consistency. □

Conventional Unconventionality & Obedient Rebellion

John Barth: *Letters: A Novel;* G. P. Putnam's Sons; New York.

by Earl Hilton

Serious subjects—Time, History, the Fate of the Novel, Being and Becoming, Identity, Revolution—flock through *Letters.* In 772 pages of rather small print they have room to flock. Long before the end the reader wishes that, having flocked, they would migrate. It cannot be sheer coincidence that the novel appears at the same time as Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* with its ostentatious invocations of Conrad and Eliot. Heavy investors in the entertainment industry must believe there is a large market for seriousness and High Culture.

Himself a character in the novel, Barth is in a position to discuss his theory of the novel, and he does so at length. Since he tells us that his chief interest is in form, form is a good place to begin. *Letters* is an epistolary novel. With this bow to Samuel Richardson and the 18th century, it can be traditional as well as modernist, or perhaps ultramodern by being traditional, although, in keeping with the modernist tradition of concealment, Barth mocks modernism and presents his heavy subjects in a tone of bitter comedy. *Letters* features seven writers, including Barth, but not including writers whose work is transmitted to us by their descendants. Certainly the book abounds in letters: between the author and his fictitious creations, found in bottles; to dead fathers, unborn children, missing children; from the writer to himself; from men believed dead. One writer may be a computer-aided insect.

One writer, Todd Andrews, is a lawyer. Others are novelists, academics, and one family whose sole occupation is intrigue. The cast expands in the present time-setting (most letters are dated 1969) to include others whose lives touch on the lives of the writers. Thus we meet heirs to an agribusiness conglomerate, film directors, activists black, white, and disguised as red (reenactment of the Boston Tea Party), psychiatrists, and one lone working man, a stone mason. But he is carried off by cancer. Through the characters' preoccupation with history, the time embraced by the novel moves back to, roughly, the period of the American Revolution. Through asides by the author it moves forward to the Bicentennial. Through one character's preoccupation with myth (an old concern of Barth's) we meet Perseus, an early discoverer of the generation gap. Historic personages in the resulting cast of hundreds include George III, Napoleon, Mme. de Staël, Tecumseh, Lafitte, Lord Jeffrey Amherst. Intermittently, past and present, lives touch. Germaine Pitt has been married to a recent Jeffrey Pitt, Lord Amherst, and bears the same first name as her chief subject of historical research, Mme. de Staël. An early member of the Cook-Burlingame family has rescued Mme. de Staël from the terrors of the French Revolution and been seduced by her. Almost every male character at some time "gets into the knickers" (Germaine Pitt's term) of almost every female character of his period. But these are transitory encounters.

"I'm convinced that it is a work of genius."
—Thomas R. Edwards
New York Times Book Review

Obviously, Barth is doing two things. First, he touches base on every issue in current fashion, from pacifism-isolationism through Indian Power to environmentalism. Second, he speculates upon, or plays games with, such more lasting topics as time and timelessness,

Professor Hilton teaches British and American literature at Northern Michigan University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fact (or history) and fiction, illusion and reality. One game is with cycles in myth, history, individual lives. The university in which two members of the cast teach is built on an Indian burial ground; its Latin motto is variously translated as "The past fertilizes the future" or "The past craps up the future." The Cook-Burlingame family alternates between names with each new generation and each male heir gives his life to overthrowing what he perceives as the purpose of his father. Each heir in the Mack family is a radical activist when young, a conservative entrepreneur when old. Mensch, a novelist, writes books based on myth cycles and tries to liberate himself from his past by ritual re-enactment. Lord Jeffrey Amherst's gift of smallpox-laden blankets to Indians is placed parallel to contemporary biological warfare.

Appearance and reality, a theme as old as literature, interweaves with the newer concern with the media and the way it alters perception and reality. The phrase "death of the novel" is as old as Samuel Richardson, Barth tells us, yet he continues to bemoan that slow dying. One character programs a computer (with such material as the *Monarch Notes*) to produce the Revolutionary Novel. Another produces a screen scenario based on Barth's past work, work in progress, and prospective future work. But the director asserts independence by refusing to read the script. In turn, the writer plans a novel based on the film. In addition, we have communication by letter, Xerox copies of letters, logos, mottoes, bumper stickers; recorded on tape, in code; delivered by bullhorn, telegraph, and laser beam. Many messages are forged; most are suspect.

Returning again to 18th-century tradition, Barth gives us the old trick of concealed identity. All Cook-Burlingame males act in disguise, impersonating others. Three characters finally merge into one. Any agent in the novel may be a double agent; any servant of the King, the Confederacy, or the Third Reich may be secretly a servant of the Continental Congress, the Union, or the Allies. Any terrorist may be secretly an FBI counterterrorist. In the same line, no child knows his own father, although he can safely bet his father is not his mother's husband. On another level of the appearance and reality theme, all definitions are blurred. History becomes fiction, and fiction alters history. Sanity and madness shift across an uncertain border. Inversions occur within inversions. Harrison Mack in one state knows himself to be Harrison Mack fancying himself to be George III mad; in another he fancies himself to be George III fancying himself Harrison Mack sane.

There is much speculation on codes, cyphers, cryptograms. There is little on astrology, oddly enough, but a great deal on possible meaning or reality glimpsed through patterns in history. Few dates are given without a listing of twenty or more famous or infamous men born on that date, twenty or more major or minor events occurring on it.

All this mystification (never rising into mystery because mystery requires subtlety and depth in characterization) is a game Barth apparently enjoys. It also serves notice that here is a serious work, worthy of review in the *Times* and suitable for interpretation in scholarly journals. To attract a wider audience, Barth falls back on the dependable staples of sex and politics. Sex is abundant and, in a word used by Professors of Education, innovative. In an effort to be original at all costs, Barth gives us a leading lady who has been deflowered by H. G. Wells with a capped fountain pen. Others mate in academic offices while telephoning. Every time lawyer Andrews takes his boat on Chesapeake Bay some lovely woman jumps on board and stimulates his aging lust. He is delightfully surprised each time. The reader is not. As a final fillip we are given a scene of possible incest—another 18th-century tradition. In the 18th century the affair is either not consummated or the relationship is disproved. Here, the question of relationship is not resolved, but it does not matter. When all sexual restraints have been abolished, incest adds neither thrill nor horror, but only an additional weight of boredom.

The politics are conventional and predictable liberalism. We are given reports of atrocities on both sides in the American Revolution, Indian wars, the War of 1812, but not in the war in Vietnam. There, all atrocities are attributed to Americans. Ho and his cause are still sacred. Even when he steps from his 1969 time-frame and speaks in 1978, Barth shows no recognition of how many leftist slogans of that war era have been proved false. It is a comment on both Barth's ethics and his politics that Andrews, who seems to be his moral norm, accepts earnestness (at least earnestness on the left) as proof of moral value. Andrews dies a willing sacrifice to the explosives of young Drew Mack. His final hope is that the man trapped with him is an FBI or CIA agent. Clearly this book is meant to sell to a hundred thousand conventionally unconventional and obediently rebellious junior professors.

In 772 pages there are occasional accurate insights into our age and many flashes of wit. One of the latter is the name of a novel by a Spanish lady of the Napoleonic era who somehow wanders into *this* novel: *The Woman Before Whom the Man Before Whom All Rome Trembled Trembled.* But the dominant impression is of wasted effort and intelligence. As I have suggested, the novel fails in its characters. Only one, Germaine Pitt, aging British scholar and sexpot, arouses liking or sympathy. And she is certain to be attacked by feminists as a Patient Griselda. As might be expected from a novelist who admits to more interest in form than in language, and in language than in the world it reports, other characters are not people but representatives of the novelist's ideas and additional spokesmen for those ideas. No freedom

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to grow and change for these characters. They represent a failure of insight and sympathy. Barth has an abundance of what the Romantics called fancy, a lack of what Romantics called imagination.

Above all, the novel needed, but did not get, a cutting such as Maxwell Perkins gave the manuscripts of Thomas Wolfe. Barth's early story "Lost in the Funhouse" is one of the best of our time, but an inferior retelling adds nothing here. The same is true of material from other earlier works. In the parts that are not duplications, so many encyclopedias of assorted information have been dumped. All those lists of dates, people, events. There is a list of famous cuckolds in history and literature. There are footnotes to leading mythologists. One is reminded of the *Guinness Book of World Records* or *The Book of Lists.* Emerson had the word for it: "a stupor of knowledge lacking inwardness." □

The Vicissitudes of Effect and Style

Tom Wolfe: *The Right Stuff;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

by Edward J. Walsh

In *Radical Chic,* published about ten years ago, Tom Wolfe never stopped taunting his subjects, Leonard Bernstein, et al.: "Deny it if you want to!" he kept repeating, as he described over and over what a pathetic ass Bernstein made of himself by hosting a soirée for a crew of political hoodlums who called themselves the Black Panthers. In *The Right Stuff,* the newest of his many books, Wolfe again leaves his victims tarnished, not twisting aptly in the wind like Bernstein and his fellow radical jet-set groupies, but stripped of the thin veneer of beatitude they unconsciously sought. They are, of course, the first seven astronauts of Project Mercury, America's first grand venture into space, and the numberless political and media hacks who tried to deify them.

Wolfe's book is skillful and enthralling because he evokes poignant memories, even in those of us who were then children, of that less complicated time when victories, and only victories—in war, diplomacy, and science—were not hoped for, but expected by the American people. The launch of the tiny Soviet Sputnik in 1957 is often pointed at, perhaps accurately, as an event that presaged a new era, the Space Age. But it was also a signal of the onset of a dogged, come-from-behind effort by the Soviet Union to be first in a world of technology undreamed of five years before. They lost the race to the moon, of course, but were curiously unmoved on the occasion of America's first lunar landing ten years ago. The reason is now known: while America channeled its scientific advances into projects like Viking and Pioneer, their missions so obscure as to be indecipherable to the general public, the Soviets turned their efforts to nuclear ballistic missiles. And they are still at it, while we see marvelous photos of Saturn on the evening news.

The triumph of Wolfe's book is that this point is made so utterly clear. The fear of what Russia would do with its satellites is what pushed Congress into funding Project Mercury until it achieved a few modest successes, after which the space program became a vehicle for electing congressmen and making money for magazines. A vision of what it all was to mean for the country—aside from the public-relations coups and some scientific advances—was never there. So there is a rub of sadness in Wolfe's sarcasm, for he nurses an idiosyncratic patriotism in his man-about-town personality. If he skewers the pols and the writers, it is because he believes they somehow led the astronauts astray, diluting their righteous stuff with cut-rate mortgages and magazine contracts, until the astronauts and their families became cult heroes, in the mold of the ultimate cult hero of that day, John F. Kennedy.

But it has not always been so, as Wolfe eloquently teaches. The Right Stuff is the spiritual quality of the test pilot, who every day takes a two-ton machine aloft, "pushing the outside of the envelope," the point where only the pilot's coolness, skill, and his metaphysical stuff can bring him back before the plane loses its aerodynamics and disintegrates in white-hot jet fuel flames, charring the pilot beyond recognition, as Wolfe jarringly describes it. In 1952, at Edwards Air Force Base, sixty-two pilots died in the course of 36 weeks of training, a rate of 1.7 per week. In the Navy, Wolfe explains, there was a 23 percent chance that a career pilot would die in an aircraft accident, and a 56 percent possibility that he would someday have to eject from a plane. The test pilots took absolute, exhilarating pleasure in these risks; obviously, those that died just didn't really have the Right Stuff. "Flight test," as it was called, was the nobility of military flying, second only to combat experience, which as the fifties progressed, fewer of them had. Of the first seven astronauts, selected from volunteers, three—Scott Carpenter, Gordon Cooper, and Alan Shepard—had not flown in combat. At first, it was a touchy subject among them. They were all heroes, as Wolfe assures us, even though we now tend to be incredulous on learning that James Reston of the *New York Times* turned away from that first press conference in 1959, when the Original Seven were introduced, confessing that his heart beat faster after meeting them. Every heart in America did, in those

Mr. Walsh is on the staff of the United States Industrial Council.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

days. Their Right Stuff glowed before the nation.

Wolfe pays the astronauts honest, generous homage. But he is a stylist first, and hero worship is not his style. We learn from him that test pilots and astronauts were and are quite human, and therefore they occasionally requested early landing times in order to hustle over to the Officers Club for some righteous Drinking, to be followed by some test pilot Driving, the quasi-official hobbies of the Brotherhood of the Right Stuff. Occasionally one was killed in an early morning auto wreck, and sometimes they took off in their thundering aircraft before their hangovers set in, never mind wore off. The families were there, somewhere in the background, since in those days a respectable marriage, which Wolfe calls the Home Front, was as necessary to advancement as flight wings. They loved the strictly Low Rent surroundings of Edwards, the Hollywood of flight test near Palmdale, California, and, it seemed, everything schmaltzy, secondhand, and threadbare in life, the tacky motels and gin mills of Cocoa Beach near Cape Canaveral, as if more decorous surroundings would distract them from the pursuit and display of their elegant, unbelievable stuff.

Well—this is all fascinating, and Wolfe's grinning unofficial history of the space program is compelling reading. But yet—why did he write this book? Tom Wolfe is a serious writer, and he does not write solely to titillate. What is the Right Stuff? Is it the inexpressible quality that most men and women of character are called upon to display at certain times in their lives, or is it just stunt-car-racing daredevilism? A dose of real courage mixed with recklessness? It must be the undefinable something that the stodgy Presbyterian, "Deacon" John Glenn, had in common with "Smilin' Al" Shepard, the terror of the Cocoa Beach Strip, a quality that, contrary to the impression Wolfe leaves with his emphasis on Drinking & Driving, is not manifested only in the observable side of life. But Wolfe limits it to that. He tells us that the hell-raisers among the Original Seven wore Banlon shirts while mucking around the amenities of Cocoa Beach and we recall that the Chaser, the smooth-talking coach of the Ethnic Catering Service in Wolfe's 1970 story, *Mau-Mauing the Flack Catchers* wore Banlon shirts. Was Wolfe there? How does he know? It's Tom Wolfe's "New Journalism" in action, of course; he's not telling us how it *really* looked, but how it seems to him it *probably* looked. The effect is what matters.

For Tom Wolfe is a writer who can write seriously in a rollicking sort of way. Even when he describes the remains of pilots who "augered in" or "crunched," burned beyond recognition, nobody gets upset. We know he's only setting the stage for lines like: "Accident-prone Mitch Johnson kept tripping over these cables until he found a telephone. Sure enough, the one injury he had was a bruised shin from tripping over a cable . . . Pete and Wally and Jim absolutely cracked up over stories like that. It was amazing. Great sports yarns!" Wolfe sketches events and circumstances with appropriate similes, capital letters, and his eternal exclamation points. He writes for tone, with rarely a matter-of-fact sentence to betray his own thoughts and feelings. These are expressed eloquently enough in his settings and his moods. The astronauts dressed like dowdy middle-classers of the fifties. Well, that is what they were. In *Radical Chic,* Leonard Bernstein wondered what kind of hors d'oeuvres the Black Panthers liked. The effect is devastating: who, after all, but a faddish libcult sadsack like Bernstein would have such a thought?

What Tom Wolfe teaches in *The Right Stuff,* as he has in his other important books, is that appearance, style, and taste matter. He is an observer of *manners,* and a master of their translation. One knows Lennie Bernstein by the company he keeps, and one comes to understand the less-than-saintly home lives of the test pilots who possessed the Right Stuff. If one astronaut comes off poorly in the book it is Glenn, the Deacon, whose ostentatious religiousness and practiced all-American good-guy image imperfectly masked his consuming ambition and his smoldering rage at not being chosen to be the first man in space, an honor that went to Smilin' Al. Today, Glenn is a complacent Senator from Ohio. "Deke" Slayton, who was scratched from the program due to an irregular heartbeat, a sure sign of not having the Right Stuff, became its most dedicated and effective administrator. Wolfe is careful to tell us that. The Right Stuff is more, and less, than it appears to be.

Wolfe's latest, then, is a substantive work of special art. What is largely unnoticed in the chuckling reception it has had among the kind of people who got indigestion over *Radical Chic,* is that *The Right Stuff* is also tinged with pathos. Many have thus far been heartily entertained by Wolfe's revelations about the after-hours pastimes of these one-day heroes whom everybody thought were such Eagle Scout All-American God-fearing Protestant small-town boys. But few have noticed Wolfe's subtle reasoning that twenty years ago, that is what people *wanted* them to be. Today, seven undivorced white males would never make the final cut.

Wolfe is writing about a different age, a different America, when the Right Stuff was right by everyone, even those who didn't have it. It is neither coincidence nor fear of writing too many pages that prompted Wolfe to limit the book to the flights of the Original Seven, and those of their compatriots at Edwards, including Chuck Yeager, who retained his knighthood of the Right Stuff even after bailing out of the NF-104. Project Mercury ended with Gordon Cooper's flight, and NASA had a tough time wringing the funding from Congress for the Gemini and Apollo series, even with President Ken-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nedy's support, in mid-1963. The fear of the Russians' "putting a red spot on the moon" was gone. A few months later, so was Kennedy. There were many more astronauts bursting with the Right Stuff to come, to soar into space for America. But we know the rest of the story. □

Political Literariness

V. S. Naipaul: *A Bend in the River;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

Kurt Vonnegut: *Jailbird;* Seymour Lawrence/Delacorte Press; New York.

by Dain A. Trafton

A good political novelist, like any novelist, must keep his art and his ideas in proper relationship. Above all, his ideas must not submerge his art. Political philosophers and propagandists put ideas first and support them by arguments or appeals to interest and passion. The main task of novelists is to imitate life; ideas emerge secondarily. Only by creating coherent and convincing plots, characters, and settings, can novelists hope to impose their judgments of the world. V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Jailbird* illustrate the truth of these principles. Both are political novels; both define the world in essentially political terms and convey a distinct political message. *A Bend in the River* demonstrates what a political novel should be: ideas grow out of artistic imitation. Vonnegut, on the other hand, appears to have been unwilling or unable to perform the novelist's primary task. Instead of carefully working out a plot, characters, and settings, he depends upon opinions by themselves to carry the book. This has long been his technique. Posing as a satirist and fantasist, he has grown accustomed to violating the ordinary constraints of imaginative fiction for the sake of his opinions. The result in *Jailbird* is a political tract—a not very consistent one—masquerading as a novel.

Dr. Trafton is Professor of English at Rockford College.

The bend in the river to which Naipaul's title refers lies in the heart of contemporary Africa. Just upstream, rapids mark the end of the great river's navigable channel; five days downstream by steamboat, and to the west, is the capital; the cities of the east coast are more than a week away by car; all around stands the vast forest where men live in villages that have hardly changed for centuries. Along the bend itself stretches a ramshackle city, part overgrown village and part modern metropolis, its air-conditioned suburbs, "polytechnic," and Bigburger stands surrounded by huts and bare earth. (Although the great river can be identified almost certainly as the Congo, the city on it as Kisangani [formerly Stanleyville], and the modern nation as Zaire, Naipaul refrains from naming them.) He speaks generally of Africa and Africans, never limiting the picture he creates to a particular nation or people. As in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—another great work in which the Congo remains nameless—the setting is meant to be symbolic. *A Bend in the River* portrays what Naipaul apparently considers the characteristic political dilemma of the "new" Africa: the deterioration of a nation that achieves independence without being prepared for it, and the poison that flows from that process into every individual life.

From the opening pages, Naipaul carefully shapes the plot, the characters, and every scene to express his political vision. The narrator, Salim, reared in a prosperous community of Muslim Indians on the east coast, has come to the city at the bend in the river to seek his fortune. He does not fear the new Africa that he sees coming. On the contrary, it offers opportunities: he has been able to buy a shop at a bargain price during the period of disorder attendant upon independence. The early part of the novel introduces us to the city as it seems to be regaining the prosperity of colonial days. Through a series of vignettes, Naipaul presents a rich image of the city's life: its population—black, Asian, European, and half-caste—its architecture, its topography, its climate. In spite of the prosperity, there are signs of trouble ahead. In the face of Ferdinand, an ambitious young man at the lycée, Salim perceives "the starting point of certain kinds of African masks, in which features were simplified and strengthened." Wedded to the new power of Western education is the old power of savagery. Before long, indeed, "the old war, the one we were still recovering from, the semitribal war that had broken out at independence and shattered and emptied the town," erupts again. One of the victims this time is Father Huismans, the Belgian priest in charge of the lycée, who loves traditional African culture and wishes to preserve it even as he seeks to instill European values into the country's future leaders. On a trip into the forest in search of primitive art, he is murdered; his decapitated and mutilated body is placed in a dugout and sent down the river as a sign.

From the second war emerges a new president—the Big Man. Much more precisely than Father Huismans and his kind, the Big Man understands the blend of Europe and primitive Africa that the new Africa requires. He employs white mercenaries to destroy his enemies, builds lavishly in concrete and glass, wears African clothes, affects the style of a chieftain, and begins to make himself the center of a cult. To express the power of the Big Man, Naipaul invents a brilliant structural device. As the Big Man extends his influence over the nation, his presence gradually pervades the novel; yet Salim never meets him or even sees him. In the novel as in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nation, the Big Man is hidden, known only at second hand through his public actions and the stories that circulate about him.

Much of the second half of the novel describes an affair between Salim and Yvette, the Belgian wife of a professor at the new "university city and research center." Through this affair, Naipaul exposes the way in which the new Africa poisons not only public life, but even the most private relationships. As the affair starts to sour, Salim understands that what he took at first for a grand passion in fact reflects the twisted world around him. For Yvette, the affair represents an escape from the hypocrisies and tensions of a university dependent upon the regime: her husband, known as "the Big Man's white man," abandons his historical research in order to edit the president's speeches. Salim is neither the first nor the last of the lovers through whom she tries to escape. For himself, Salim recognizes in disgust, Yvette is a conquest that connects him with the corrupt powers of the new Africa. In a memorably nasty scene he breaks with her and, symbolically, with the hopes that brought him to the new Africa in the first place. He still intends to make something of himself, but where he should go remains uncertain. After a final series of machinations and adventures, which portray the regime's degeneration into open tyranny, Salim extricates himself and leaves on the steamer. Civil war has broken out again. A night attack on the steamer fails, but a passenger barge for common Africans breaks loose and drifts away:

> "At the time what we saw was the steamer searchlight, playing on the riverbank, playing on the passenger barge, which had snapped loose and was drifting at an angle through the water hyacinths at the edge of the river. The searchlight lit up the barge passengers, who, behind bars and wire guards, as yet scarcely seemed to understand that they were adrift. Then there were gunshots. The searchlight was turned off; the barge was no longer to be seen. The steamer started up again and moved without lights down the river, away from the arena of battle. The air would have been full of moths and flying insects. The searchlight, while it was on, had shown thousands, white in the white light."

With this passage, the novel concludes. A helplessly drifting barge, uncomprehending men and women behind bars and wire guards, insects swarming in the harsh light, or in the darkness—these are the images that epitomize Naipaul's Africa.

* * *

A Bend in the River presents an unfashionable message with an art that compels respect even from those who disagree. In contrast, Vonnegut's *Jailbird* seems to rely on ready acceptance of its ideas; it aims consistently at the easy, unearned response. The message can be stated in the following, not entirely harmonious, set of propositions: life is absurd; the American political and economic system is unjust; the Sermon on the Mount teaches us how to live; the highest duty is to be kind and loving. The novel tells the story of Walter F. Starbuck, né Stankiewicz, the son of immigrant servants, but taken in hand and sent to Harvard by Alexander Hamilton McCone, multimillionaire of Cleveland. At Harvard, Starbuck begins to perceive the iniquities of American capitalism: he joins the Communist Party, is outraged by the story of Sacco and Vanzetti, and has an affair with Mary Kathleen O'Looney, a fiery young woman with radical views. After Harvard and Oxford, he works for the New Deal, marries a survivor of the nazi concentration camps, and then destroys his own career by inadvertently betraying a friend to Congressman Richard Nixon during the investigations of the McCarthy era. That it is Richard Nixon who, as president, gives Starbuck another government job illustrates the absurdity of things. A further absurdity sends the wholly innocent Starbuck to jail during the Watergate scandal. Freed at last, a happy chance reunites him with Mary Kathleen in New York. She is now the fabulously rich Mrs. Jack Graham, although she goes about in rags and lives in an abandoned section of the subway. As owner of the RAMJAC corporation, which controls 19 percent of the United States, she makes Starbuck and some of his acquaintances vice presidents, thus fulfilling the Sermon on the Mount's prophecy that the meek shall inherit the earth. A final meaningless accident occurs: Mary Kathleen is killed by a taxi. Discovered trying to conceal both her death and her will, Starbuck is sent to jail again. The last scene describes his farewell party; his last sentences remind us of the Sermon on the Mount.

"Superb, zany satire, establishing Vonnegut as a modern-day Swift . . ."
—*Christian Science Monitor*

"His dislikes . . . are impeccable . . ."
—*Nation*

Vonnegut's tendency to sacrifice art to political doctrine can be illustrated in a number of ways. The haphazard plot, for example, seems dictated by a desire to mirror the meaninglessness of experience. However, Vonnegut's betters in the literature of the absurd —Beckett, Camus, or Sartre—could teach him that a subtle twist often expresses the irrationality of things more effectively than gross improbabilities. The multiplying absurdities of *Jailbird* wear thin once we perceive the rather overworked idea behind them. Moreover, in spite of the plot's flabbiness, Vonnegut does not manage to make it hold all the political commentary in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the book. Sometimes he simply digresses in order to make a point. Vonnegut's case against America requires persuasive images of violence and injustice, but he fails to invent them in his fiction. Instead he simply refers to Sacco and Vanzetti from time to time; they provide him with ready-made means for the evocation of political outrage. A similar digression is the story of the "Cuyahoga Massacre," which Vonnegut invents to explain how Alexander Hamilton McCone came to take an interest in Starbuck. Traumatized by watching striking workers shot down at his family's factory, McCone became a stuttering recluse and turned to young Starbuck for companionship. Vonnegut describes the "massacre" with loving care in the opening pages, and informs us that it is "a legend in the mind of the leading character." Nevertheless, after the first lurid description, the massacre practically disappears. Once it has served its purpose as an illustration of capitalist iniquity, Vonnegut tends to forget it.

More damaging than the disordered structure is the superficiality of character and setting that afflicts the novel's most pretentious scenes. Vonnegut's treatment of an episode in the life of Dr. Robert Fender, one of Starbuck's friends from prison, exemplifies this failing. Fender—who is an author known to the literary world by such pseudonyms as Frank X. Barlow and Kilgore Trout—has been sentenced to life imprisonment for treason committed during the Korean War. A veterinarian, Fender worked as an army meat inspector in Japan, where one night he was seduced by a North Korean spy named Izumi. Learning by chance the next morning that she was being sought as a spy, Fender hid her in his apartment for eleven days. What she told him during those days about her devotion to communism seemed "just common sense on the part of a good person from another universe." At last he was discovered trying to help her escape from Japan; he was convicted of treason, and she disappeared, probably to be shot without trial in South Korea. Naipaul would have made something out of this tale: he would have taken the time to create characters and a setting adequate to the complex moral and political problem that the episode establishes. Had *he chosen to, he might have won respect* for Fender's choice even from readers who do not sympathize with treason. Vonnegut, however, does not bother to construct a solid and credible imitation of life. Of the lovers' feelings for each other, we learn only that she admired his sensitivity to Oriental culture, and he felt for her much as he had felt for a "young deer, a doe he had raised when a boy." Of the atmosphere of ambiguity and intrigue that surrounds American military bases in foreign lands, we are given nothing beyond a brief, stereotyped scene in a nightclub. Nevertheless, Vonnegut wants us to admire Fender and feel pity for the helpless doe, Izumi. Once again, Vonnegut's political ideas betray him: he relies on the modishness of his opposition to American anticommunism rather than on the novelist's proper art.

Furthermore, the story of Fender and Izumi points to an inconsistency that lies at the heart of the book's message. Vonnegut's attack on America consorts dubiously with his celebration of the Sermon on the Mount. Again and again, he returns to "the prediction by Jesus Christ that the poor in spirit would receive the Kingdom of Heaven . . . that the meek would inherit the earth." But do Izumi, the striking workers killed in the Cuyahoga Massacre, or Sacco and Vanzetti qualify as "the poor in spirit" and "the meek"? Izumi is, after all, a spy seeking to aid the communist conquest of South Korea; the strikers at Cuyahoga were not sitting quietly at home; Sacco and Vanzetti, although perhaps not guilty as charged, were political activists; and Vanzetti, by Vonnegut's own admission, may have been a murderer. One might approve of all of these characters and their causes, but one ought to have the honesty to take the consequences of one's convictions. To extol spies, demonstrating strikers, and agitators as heroes of Christian meekness deserves contempt. *Jailbird* lacks even the elementary coherence that one demands from a political tract. □

Lawful Killing in the Barbaric Present

Stephen H. Gettinger: *Sentenced to Die: The People, the Crimes, and the Controversy;* Macmillan; New York.

by Clarence B. Carson

"Arbitrary and capricious" are favorite terms of this author in describing the decisions made by juries for the execution of murderers. Arbitrary and capricious in comparison with what, we are entitled to ask. Certainly not arbitrary and capricious compared to the decision of my teen-age daughter as to what, if anything, she will eat for breakfast. She will, as that incomprehensible spirit which moves those of her vintage, moves her, eat cake, a bowl of ice cream —or nothing at all. Not arbitrary and capricious compared to the decision of my younger daughter as to what dress she will wear to Sunday School. She can be arbitrary, capricious, *and* adamant.

But, it may be objected, the decision to execute a person is a grave one, while those about what to eat or wear are merely frivolous. Not only do I concur in the objection but insist on the validity of the distinction. My main

Dr. Carson is an essayist from Alabama.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reason for bringing forth these frivolous examples is to shed some light on the meaning of "arbitrary and capricious." It helps me, too, to back into the point that only like things should be compared with one another. In order to substantiate the claim that decisions to execute are arbitrary and capricious we need to have those decisions compared with like ones. Before proceeding to that point, however, a related one needs to be got out of the way.

Despite Mr. Gettinger's apparent belief that he has done so, his examples do not make a prima facie case that the decisions were arbitrary and capricious. He presents extensive reviews of eight men who were sentenced to death. In each case, the man was charged with and found guilty of either premeditated murder or murder committed while in the act of committing a felony. Each of them had a jury trial, had at least one attorney, was protected against self-incrimination, was permitted to submit evidence on his own behalf, and was accorded a presumption of innocence. Some of the crimes were particularly horrible: a man beat his wife to death in bed and killed one of his small children with a poker (after making sexual advances on one of his daughters); another involved the killing of a man in bed and attacking his wife who was beside him; another was a father who gave poisoned candy to one of his children on Halloween, and so on. A good case can be made that the murders were arbitrary and capricious. On the face of it, no such case is made that the decisions to execute were. At the time of the writing of the book, none of the appeals made on behalf of the murderers had moved any court to decide so.

Now to the comparison. Generically, what is involved in capital punishment (or execution) is the killing of a person by the state. The relevant comparison is with other sorts of deaths that the state, through its agents, causes. Mr. Gettinger apparently believes that the relevant comparison is with those in similar circumstances whom the state does not execute. Unfortunately, such comparisons can only be made by second-guessing the relevant authorities, namely, judges and juries. That is a game which any of us could play but for which few of us are called and none are chosen. There is no way that we can literally put ourselves in the place of judges and juries. With the best imagination in the world and the deepest understanding, one thing would still be missing. We would not be responsible for making the decision. In any case, the comparison should be with those the state does put to death, not with those with whom it does not.

Fortunately, there is bountiful evidence for such killings, and much of it is common knowledge. Policemen kill people in the course of the discharge of their duties. They do so in self-defense, to prevent a crime, to apprehend suspects, and sometimes accidentally and unintentionally. National Guardsmen kill people in the course of attempting to restore order where the situation has gotten out of hand. There has been a goodly number of highly publicized cases of this sort in the last decade or two. Above all, armed forces kill people, sometimes in great numbers, when they make war. All of these, when performed in the course of duty, are acts of state. They are killings done by the state, as it were, generally understood to be such by those who do them and by those who authorize such acts.

It requires no great insight to perceive that by comparison with the execution of murderers, these killings are arbitrary and capricious. No trial has been held to determine their guilt or innocence. No jury has been selected with care to determine the facts. No judge has been appointed to make rulings on the law. The persons killed have not been allowed to call witnesses on their behalf. In the case of war, the killings are apparently random, and the persons killed may be entirely innocent of any offense which could have provoked the conflict. Clearly, if caprice is the arbiter, these state killings are infinitely more capricious than executions.

If these worms were not already out of the can and wriggling around I would not have opened it. Mr. Gettinger did not choose to do so, of course. He discusses the pros and cons of capital punishment isolated from the broader question of state killings. While he does present arguments on both sides of the case, his is nonetheless a brief against capital punishment. It is even more pointed than that. It is written within the framework of the resumption of executions under laws that were supposed to conform with Supreme Court strictures. The gravamen of his work is that the goals of the Supreme Court cannot be met and that the Court should stop all executions and align the United States with all those "progressive" nations in the world that prohibit capital punishment. In any case, he views the resumption as a barbaric relic from the past.

In case Mr. Gettinger does not know it, the worms are already out of the can, and they need to be considered before we jump on our horses and go riding off into the sunset toward our glorious future. Capital punishment is not the only issue before us. Whatever Mr. Gettinger may believe, many of those who oppose capital punishment are also opposed to arming policemen with guns, supplying National Guardsmen with live ammunition, and sending soldiers off to fight in wars. A broader issue is at stake, though it is not raised so boldly and stridently as that of capital punishment. It is usually raised piecemeal, but it needs to be faced squarely and whole. The issue is the propriety of state killing.

Capital punishment is the keystone of the arch of state power. It is irresponsible to discuss it in isolation from that. It is self-evident that if the state is not prepared to kill it cannot perform its proper functions. It cannot defend itself from its enemies. It cannot defend its inhabitants from their enemies. It cannot defend the life, liberty, and property of those who dwell within its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bounds. It cannot defend its citizens effectively when they go abroad. The government that is unprepared to kill is living on borrowed time, borrowed either from its own past, when it was prepared to kill, or borrowed from protective neighbors ready to take up weapons in its behalf. That those nations of Western Europe, hailed as progressive by Mr. Gettinger, which have abolished capital punishment, make poor allies has been amply demonstrated in the last two decades. Capital punishment is not just a holdover from the barbaric past; it is the centerpiece of the defense of life, liberty, and property in the barbaric present.

If capital punishment is not justified, then where is the justification for the state to kill? If a man may not be executed who has been adjudged guilty by a jury of his peers, afforded all the protections of the law, been permitted, and even aided, to defend himself, how can any other state killing be justified? How can we justify permitting policemen to kill? How can we justify permitting National Guardsmen to be armed? How can we justify sending soldiers into battle? That is not to say that a nation may not abolish capital punishment and continue to kill in other ways. Clearly, it might, and some do. But such a nation has compromised its commitment to justice. It has said, in effect, we will continue to do what we have to do, but we will not do it as a deliberate act of justice. The tendency of this is to remove justice from the equation of state action. When that is done, there is an inevitable reversion to barbarism.

Executions are symbols of the ultimate power of the state and of its commitment to justice. The state has the power to kill of necessity, but what distinguishes a civilized state from a band of outlaws is its commitment to use that power only in the pursuit of justice. What the state, at its best, says by an execution is that it would not kill in other ways were it not defied, that it would submit all cases to a proper tribunal for adjudication if it could, and that it only kills in the interest of justice.

The basic question about capital punishment is this: Is it just to take the life of a man who has deliberately taken the life of another (or placed himself in circumstances in which he is likely to do so deliberately, or has betrayed his countrymen in war)? All other questions are subsidiary to this one. Whether or not capital punishment will deter others is a subsidiary question. If it is not just to do it, it would not become so by deterring others. The question of the reformation of the criminal is also subsidiary. As the late C.S. Lewis pointed out, the fundamental question about any punishment is whether the criminal deserved it or not. Does a murderer deserve to die? If so, it is just for the state to put him to death. If not, all other reasons are insufficient to establish the case.

Mr. Gettinger has managed to befuddle the issues sufficiently to confuse all but the most intrepid of his readers. He has submitted a bounty of evidence that murderers—at least those that he examined—remained human beings even after they had done their terrible deeds. If you cut them, they will bleed. If you are kind to them, they may respond in the same manner. They are often still beloved of those who loved them before. They are capable of fearing greatly their forthcoming executions and of longing for the continuation of life. Some, at least, are not beyond remorse and repentance. They are such stuff as God in his mercy may see fit to redeem. He lets us know subtly, too, that when we look upon the face of a murderer there is in it some reflection of ourselves, even as in the face of all men. If their humanity were the issue, Mr. Gettinger would have convinced me, at least.

But it is not. It is not we but they who have denied their humanity. By premeditated murder, they have denied their common human bond with those they killed. It is precisely because they are human that they have been sentenced to die. May God have mercy on their souls. □

Some Very Special Truths

Doris Grumbach: *Chamber Music;* E. P. Dutton; New York.

by Erich Eichman

Early in his study of the late 19th-century American composer, Edward MacDowell, Lawrence Gilman writes:

> "In June, 1884, MacDowell returned to America, and on July 21, at Waterford, Connecticut, he was married to his former pupil, Miss Marian Nevins —a union, which, for perfection of sympathy and closeness of comradeship, was, during the quarter of a century for which it was to endure, nothing less than ideal."

Mr. Eichman is Assistant Managing Editor of the American Spectator.

Chamber Music is the fictional memoir of the composer's wife, now ninety and "freed by . . . survival into extreme old age" from the decorum of her younger days, when secrets "lived quietly under the breath." The devotion of Gilman's account, it turns out, was but a pretense, behind which lay "extraordinary," and sordid, truths.

In her introduction, Mrs. Grumbach cautions us to remember that, despite the many parallels between the Maclarens of her novel and the MacDowells of history, hers is fiction, not biography. At any rate, whether there were any hidden truths, sordid or otherwise, in the lives of the MacDowells of which Gilman, like everyone else, was unaware, we shall never know, because Marian MacDowell, although pressed for years

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to write a biographical remembrance of her late husband, always declined, in part, she said, because of her "lack of any gift as a writer." She did, however, agree to write some "random notes" on the composer and his works. They are, for the most part, as schoolgirlish as this one:

> "When he returned to America the extraordinary difference he found in a New England autumn was entrancing. The vivid colors—every shade of red and yellow—made him feel that the trees were flaunting defiance to the idea of death . . . It is this feeling that led him to write the composition *The Joy of Autumn.*"

Probably not coincidentally, Mrs. Grumbach's narrator, Caroline Maclaren, sounds very much like this. Unfortunately, her subject is less suited to the style. Marian MacDowell, at least, was recounting those bucolic episodes from which her husband was supposed to have drawn inspiration for his unabashedly romantic, and often sentimental, music. Perhaps he deserved no better. Caroline Maclaren, on the other hand, writing in "freer times," is determined to write "extraordinary truths," which in *Chamber Music* include loneliness, barrenness, masturbation, incest, homosexuality, and syphilis—in short, the stuff of the modern novel.

Even so, there is a certain appropriateness to the simplicity of Mrs. Grumbach's narrative style because it takes on that deliberately understated, hushed, "poetic" tone which is the hallmark of a certain tawdry kind of confessional literature to which *Chamber Music* belongs. It is especially appealing to feminist writers, like Mrs. Grumbach, interested in showing the tragic extinction of the unmoored, sensitive feminine soul in a world of men.

Caroline's father dies when she is nine, and her mother, overcome by the loss, remains forever after emotionally comatose, oblivious to everything but grief. Already equipped with that delicate sensibility that is to make her such a cloyingly sentimental memorialist years later, Caroline expresses a desire to study piano, apparently because the piano is a sensible thing: "I wanted to . . . stroke those soft ivory strips, each with its slight lip, and the rounded edges of the black keys . . ." She studies with a Mrs. Seton who never says a word to Caroline in six years of lessons. At a recital Caroline meets her future husband in this exchange, one of their longest.

> "The young man standing next to me holding his cup carefully said, 'you must be Caroline Newby.'
>
> 'Yes.'
>
> 'I'm glad to meet you at last. Mrs. Seton speaks often of you. My name is Maclaren. Robert Maclaren.' He laughed a little. 'Robert Glencoe Maclaren. My mother calls me Rob.' "

Not only does his mother call him Rob, but she shares a bedroom with him, as Caroline discovers when she goes to Europe with Robert after their marriage. This occasions a good bit of jealousy, both cold and silent. Luckily, Caroline keeps a diary. Relations reach a kind of crisis when Caroline discovers her mother-in-law upon her son's bed performing, as it were, a ritual of frustrated love.

When they return to America—he a famous composer, she a "duster of piano keys"—life is little better, even *sans maman.* Robert, listening to the music in his head, grows increasingly self-absorbed, quiet, and sexually disinterested. Moreover, to the tragedies of this loveless life, among which is Caroline's failure to reach a woman's full, ovulatory maturity, is added duplicity, which is helped along by Caroline's insipidity. When she discovers love letters addressed to her husband from a former (male) student, she considers them an extension of that "unfathomable alliance among men of talent." And when Robert comes to suffer more and more from pustular rashes of growing intensity—well, she fails to put one and one together, so to speak. The truth about her husband's illness must finally come from Anna, the young, buxom nurse who attends the last, viscous stages of Robert's syphilitic death and with whom Caroline enjoys a short, but nearly perfect, lesbian affair.

"Chamber Music becomes a parable of tender human regeneration as Caroline experiences sexual awakening in a lesbian relationship with Anna . . ."
—*Commonweal*
(a Catholic journal of opinion)

"The lush romanticism of her scenes . . ."
—*Ms.*

". . . from start to finish, stately and classical . . ."
—*New York Times Book Review*

Appropriately enough, nowhere is the self-consciously artless narrative tone of this morally repellent story more apparent than in the hymn to lesbian love which ends it. Anna's "glowing flesh and warm heart," her "gentle, capable hands," her "low, charming voice," her cutely eccentric folkways, her cutely eccentric homilies on gardening, her tight, scrubbed skin, her candor—all conspire to melt Caroline's frozen heart (her metaphor). So perfect is their union that the terrible silence of Caroline's earlier life is transformed. There is "no need for talk," for instance, when they are working together in the garden, disentangling a plant's roots: "Our fingers came together around the stem. We looked up and smiled at each other, holding hands in the fragrant soil surrounding the young roots of the wisteria vine. In such silent but telling ways Anna spoke to me." Even with such

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

metaphors of growth and fertility built into the story (and heavy-handedly corresponding to Caroline's finally achieving feminine maturity, at age thirty), Caroline still casts about for an image to better describe her lover. She finally finds it: "soft spring rain." Incidentally, in order that outward events chime well with what is, after all, a mawkishly praise-filled account, Anna is a devout Catholic, trudging off to church every morning at five, and a dedicated nurse, so dedicated in fact that she allows an influenza to carry her off in the course of ministering to the victims of a kind of local plague.

Caroline's narrative tone, marked by postcard tenderness here but through most of the novel applied to desperate, lonely reflections, has the effect of denaturing the story, such as it is, and giving the whole narrative an intellectual aridity, and emotional superabundance, that we cannot but attribute to the narrator herself. Even granting a ninety-year-old woman the inflated sentiment of memory, for the sake of verisimilitude, Caroline Maclaren is obviously one of those narrators who require some manipulative irony from the author in order to be taken seriously. By her own account, she is limited in the kinds of things she may learn, and only marginally capable of extracting meaning from what are, for the most part, tragic circumstances. Even so, and as repugnant as the possibility is, given Caroline's degraded moral sense, Mrs. Grumbach might have shored up our sympathies, usually well on the side of the narrator in a first-person account, had she pulled back a bit, injecting dramatic irony. But there is no distance between Mrs. Grumbach and her narrator, because Mrs. Grumbach provides no evidence that what Caroline finally sees diverges from what the facts are, evidently, or that Caroline's maundering conclusions about the meaning of her life are hopelessly wrong-headed. Nothing in the way Anna acts, for instance, nothing in her reported speech, gainsays her cloying goodness, wonderfulness, etc. The same is true of Robert and his lovelessness. The wordless Mrs. Seton is a kind of apotheosis of the problem—unbelievable to the point of parody. Grumbach is simply unable to convince us that such people are possible, even in her novel, so we can't take them seriously, or the woman remembering them in her memoir.* Of course, it might be argued that in writing her memoir, Caroline is being selective—memory works that way—but nothing outside memory is giving us a fix on how selective, and in what way.

Mrs. Grumbach obviously wishes for us to see Caroline as a victim of powerful forces, haunted by silence and kept alive (just barely) by the memory of her one true love. Second only to homosexual love, the highest moral value in the story is suffering, and not the suffering of ethical dilemma, despite the book's many opportunities for it, but of out-and-out victimization. This is what gives the book its tone of whimpering emotionalism. If the protagonist and narrator is dwarfed beside genius, uncomprehending amid duplicity, and craven before moral abuse, so much the better. In this way Mrs. Grumbach may appeal to broadly accepted sentiments—about the tragedy of loneliness, the pain of isolation, the joy of discovering love and the pain of losing it—in the hope that we might be won over to Caroline's moral code without stopping to wonder whether, even in tragic circumstances, homosexual love is truly redeeming. In other words, the dice are loaded dramatically in preparation for the denouement, in order to make the homosexuality acceptable. Mrs. Grumbach lays waste to everything good and right in life and when her protagonist suffers finally in the squalor of her husband's, the torturer's, last days, the great budding of redemption comes, lo, in the form of an unbelievably clean, "innocent," sensitive, self-sacrificing German-born nurse whose simple charm is matched only by her simple mind. Add to that her "bosoms" and her willingness to follow Caroline to bed and you have the saving angel in Mrs. Grumbach's morality play.

Moreover, theirs is a saving relationship, Mrs. Grumbach would have us believe, not because it is homosexual, but because it is founded on those "spiritual and intuitive harmonies" (Caroline's stated preconditions to physical love—presumably of any kind) she was never able to find with her husband. Even so, those harmonies seem to depend not a little on the egalitarian nature of homosexual love:

> "Between us there was no flirtatiousness, as there is so often in the world of men and women. We had no struggle for dominance, we experienced no submissiveness. We were each dominant and each submissive when we needed to be. Sometimes I took her in my arms, sensing her need for comfort. At other times I wished to be held, helped, comforted."

Appropriately, the misery leading up to this perfect union is ideological as well, derived as it is from the idea, propounded by many feminist theorists, that victimization can be a kind of identity for women, particularly those laboring under the yoke of hollow domesticity and conjugal subordination. Thus, Robert is a celebrity, Caroline only a "maker of late suppers," a trifling ornament in his life. Moreover, despite his usual passivity, Robert is able to rise up and strike a blow for victimization by disrupting with gratuitous cruelty a happy moment of music making between Caroline and a female friend, a Mrs. Marino, who, by the way, finishes out her life tragically, singing snatches of opera in a nursing home, another victim of the male cabal.

It is ideology, then, which both leads Mrs. Grumbach to demonstrate the redeeming value of homosexual love and constrains her to apply that value selec-

*Wayne Booth discusses this problem at length in *The Rhetoric of Fiction.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tively, to its feminine, and political, mode. Thus, Robert's homosexuality is furtive, introverted, tasted but once, as if out of profound guilt, and paid for for a lifetime, in the suffering his wife experiences at neglect, sexually and emotionally, and in the literal symbol of the burden of wrong, the disease which reduces him to the most pathetic of physical specimens before killing him. In contrast, Caroline's homosexual love is honest, sustained, celebrant, and, as I say, ostensibly founded on principles equally applied to connubial love.

And it is ideology, no less pernicious for being couched ingenuously, which leads Mrs. Grumbach to wonder, through her narrator—and, as I have pointed out, there is nothing separating the two—how many

> "truths of the secret lives of women are lost to history in the still, social afternoon air that hovers between two women as they reveal the small singlenesses of their sex, the behavior of their husbands as lords, as lovers? Quickly said, revealed in a breath, in low tones, even whispers, such special truths are quickly buried and forgotten. And yet they hold more valuable human reality for the searcher after truth than the dates of history and the narratives of the lives and deaths of kings."

The falsity of this last statement, I submit, is demonstrated by *Chamber Music* itself. □

Timelessness and the Itch of Modernism

James Hitchcock: *Catholicism & Modernity;* Seabury Press; New York.

by Christopher Manion

> "In former days, the heretic was proud of not being a heretic. It was the kingdoms of the world and the judges who were heretics. He was orthodox . . . all the tortures torn out of forgotten hells could not make him admit that he was heretical. But a few modern phrases have made him boast of it."
>
> —G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics,* 1895

In every age Catholicism has challenged the "spirit of the times." It has presented to the world a set of standards designed not to make believers more dear to the world, but to lift them *above* it, to offer them a glimpse of eternity from the perspective of *homo viator,* man the pilgrim. And in every age the world has responded to this challenge by enunciating "a few modern phrases"—and by going about its business of distracting potential saints from their calling to till the soils of the eternal garden. The "modern phrases" confronting the contemporary Church received their baptism of fire in the French Revolution; today, they constitute a systematic vocabulary which threatens to wrest it from the eternal realm and subordinate it to the spirit of our times. In 1907 Pope Pius X warned the Catholic faithful of the "partisans of error . . . not only among the Church's open enemies, but . . . in her very own bosom"; "reformers of the Church" were employing the "cleverest of devices" in "presenting their doctrines without order and systematic arrangement, in a scattered and disjointed manner, so as to make it appear as if their minds were in doubt or hesitation, whereas in reality they are quite fixed and steadfast." *(Pascendi, I)*

James Hitchcock, president of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars and Professor of History at Saint Louis University, has rendered the modernist spirit (and its critics) a great service: in its own terms, derived from an analysis of modernism in the Catholic Church in America since Vatican II, he has penetrated its "scattered and disjointed manner" and presented it in a coherent formulation and critique. This certainly will invite a response from the modernist camp; while we might expect no early reply, we should nonetheless welcome this analysis as a seminal contribution to the understanding of our own era.

The Second Vatican Council, conceived by John XXIII and concluded under Paul VI in 1965, was the focal point of the crisis in the Church which is the subject of this study. In 1971, Hitchcock outlined the expectations of those who hoped that Vatican II would bring the Church into the 20th century:

> "In the heady days of the Council it was common to hear predictions that the conciliar reforms would lead to a massive resurgence of the flagging Catholic spirit. Laymen would be stirred from their apathy and alienation and would join enthusiastically in apostolic projects. Liturgy and theology, having been brought to life and made relevant, would be constant sources of inspiration to the faithful. The religious orders, reformed to bring them into line with modernity, would find themselves overwhelmed with candidates who were generous and enthusiastic. The Church would find the number of converts increasing dramatically as it cast off its moribund visage and indeed would come to be respected and influential in worldly circles as it had not been for centuries. In virtually every case the precise opposite of these predictions has come to pass."

To the bitter disappointment of the liberal forces, the Vatican Council produced a set of documents calling for *renewal* of the timeless efforts of the Church to proclaim the gospel of salvation to all men and rejecting modernist

Mr. Manion, a graduate of Notre Dame, is Assistant to the Director of the Rockford College Institute.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

attempts to reform basic doctrine. Even before the Council had ended, then, the "spirit of Vatican II" was manufactured by the partisans of reform and radical change in the Church. In the following years, this "spirit" was much more operative in many quarters than the actual Council documents, whose careful and measured formulations were often eschewed by those with a preference for more innovative pronouncements. Hitchcock traces the present crisis to the "crisis of faith" suffered by many of the elite of the Church—priests, nuns, seminary professors, and lay intellectuals—who felt that the modern world was passing the Church by, and that she should strive to catch up. Hitchcock explains the urge to mundane conformity manifested by these forces:

> "Many Catholics of the postconciliar era were like concert-goers who had struggled for years, dutifully and piously, to penetrate the inner mysteries of Beethoven and Stravinsky, only to be told, finally, that their music was outdated and that Henry Mancini was indeed the truest representative of artistic profundity. The message, announced publicly by the very conductors and critics who had tried to instill a love for Beethoven, might at first be greeted with incredulity and resistance, but soon the sighs of relief, the comfortable settling back, could be heard from all over the concert hall."

When subjected to Hitchcock's analytical gaze, the struggle in the postconciliar Church becomes a microcosm of the contemporary challenge to the American spirit. Many dimensions of the culture are subjected to the same disintegrating forces: reformers who pride themselves in their *de*conversion and their innovative "independence" from "rigid positions"; "toleration" for all but the orthodox—who do not pretend to be pluralists; doctrinal confusion which dilutes the authority of the Hierarchy and increases that of the middle-management Church bureaucracy, which has mushroomed in size since 1965, and which encourages the confusion to insure the growth of its own influence. Such tendencies will be recognizable to students of constitutional law, educational theory, or the relationship of the public to the private sector in our economy. The analytical precision which emerges in Hitchcock's study offers testimony to the increasingly important role of religion in the culture, and provides a significant theoretical contribution to the discipline of cultural analysis.

Each of Hitchcock's chapters deals with a different facet of the modernist phenomenon: his treatment of the "imperial self" recounts the shift of emphasis from salvation to self-fulfillment, with sexual liberation ("compassion") replacing discipline, and a "pastoral" (permissive) approach replacing outdated "rigidity." The striving to save one's soul gives way to the search to find one's self. Man is born to be pleased, not saved: the capitulation to the therapeutic mentality is complete. And the chapter dealing with "the loss of history" highlights the intentional amnesia of a whole class of churchmen who prefer historical relativism to the eternal, unchanging mission of the Church. They impatiently await Vatican III, and persevere in the struggle.

Hitchcock brilliantly describes how the modernists have rejected the timeless role of the Church, and embraced the utopian politics already adopted (and often soon discarded) by their colleagues in the secular culture. Nowhere else has this been more clearly demonstrated

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

The People

"Mr. Harris's glittering journalistic credentials entitled him to a full hearing in his venture into fictional creativity. His background as a presumed expert on American law and politics promised portraits of realistic leaders and of the remarkable suppleness, the compassion and the protection of individual rights that make the American criminal the most protected species of wild animal in the world . . . Mr. Harris's novelistic venture seems to embody . . . his hatred of this land, its people and their institutions—and his own stature beyond the ability of anyone else to describe."

from "The Thin (Liberal) Man"
by Otto J. Scott

Also:
Opinions & Views—Commendables—In Focus
Waste of Money—The American Proscenium
Stage—Screen—Music—Liberal Culture
Journalism—Polemics & Exchanges

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than in the response to the visits of Pope John Paul II to Mexico and the United States this past year. At Puebla, John Paul forcefully rejected the notion that man could be reduced to the Marxist categories of "liberation theology," and offered instead the teachings of the Church, which proclaim the liberation of man's spirit from the wages of sin. No sooner had he returned to Rome than the vehicles of the modernist persuasion began to trumpet his *endorsement* of liberation theology, an assertion which they might well have believed in their ideological rapture.

When John Paul visited the United States, the intensity of the modernist thrust to by-pass his spiritual message, or translate it into ideologically acceptable (secular) terms, increased. The "objective" media continually sought to carry on the conversation in their own ideological terms, and to enhance any "controversy" which lent itself to that inherent bias. Consider the profeminist motivation: one Washington-area priest, whose sole distinction is his support for women's ordination, was interviewed by the media no less than *seventy-five* times. Sister Theresa Kane's introduction of John Paul in Washington was more often noted for its "courage" in chiding the Pontiff about women's ordination than for the disruption which her tiny minority of followers caused during the appearance. And as it became increasingly clear that the Pope had come to America to restate clear and fundamental rules about magisterial (hierarchical) authority, sexual morality, and the permanence of marriage and religious views, the airwaves were full of interviews of married priests who "love the Church no less" but were "forced to choose between the Church they served and the women they loved."

Such dewy-eyed claptrap might appear to be mere propaganda, but it is more: the famous Austrian novelist, Robert Musil, observed in the period which followed the collapse of the Austrian monarchy the ideological phenomenon which he called the "second reality," an irrational dream world wherein the metaphysical rebel could freely indulge in speculation unimpeded by reality of any theoretical niceties—truth, logic, and the like *(Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften,* 1930-33). In this spirit, Latin American "liberation theologians" persist in their willful ignorance of the binding relationship between economic prodution, democracy, and capitalism. And in America modernists thrive on such make-believe, insisting that the Church conform to ideological categories—Marxism, therapeutic psychology, positivism, or sentimental liberalism—rather than to the transcendental character of her mission as instituted by Christ and defined by Church authority and tradition. Such partisans will always consider the Church as nothing more than one more "special-interest group"—powerful, no doubt, hundreds of millions strong, but of no more eternal consequence than, say, the Democratic Party. (But with the same temporal usefulness: the American Church has become increasingly political precisely in those matters where its pronouncements have no divine dispensation—for instance, SALT II and minimum-wage legislation; and socialists vibrantly applauded Pope Paul VI's aversion to capitalism or any "liberal ideology which believes it exalts individual freedom by withdrawing it from every limitation." The point to be made here is not that Paul VI misunderstood capitalism: the Church has long been clinging to the aristocratic notion that capitalism is merely the economic dimension of the Reformation heresy of individualism. Rather, we must recognize that, in taking positions on political issues on which prudent men might find weighty reasons to take either side, the Church trivializes its function of speaking authoritatively to the faithful on the matters of faith and morals which constitute the deposit of faith.)

The "second reality" thus proceeds from wishful thinking which provides the ideologue with an imaginary alternative to the real world. Such a precarious vision must give way, however, when confronted with an unavoidable obstacle in the dimension of reality. If the modernists deem the authority of the papacy as exercised by the new Pontiff to be such an impediment to their agenda, Hitchcock does not deny that the ensuing conflict might well result in open schism. Such an eventuality has already been adumbrated in the firmness with which the Pope has acted in matters of doctrinal discipline since his return to Rome. He has required that all Catholic universities assure the Vatican that their teachers of philosophy and theology actually conform to Catholic doctrine. He has reaffirmed the Church's tradition of male clergy, and encouraged women in the religious life to cultivate the virtues of sacrifice and service. One feminist at Notre Dame was "enraged" by this "arrogant, chauvinistic, and vulgar" response to Sister Kane's "restrained, respectful moderation," and suggested "the possibility of beginning a parallel church." Similar reactions by the American liberal elite have become even more pronounced with the recent disciplining of Swiss theologian Hans Küng, who has spent the past ten years actively campaigning against fundamental Church doctrine through his writings, appearances on American university campuses, and articles on the op-ed page of the *New York Times.* It is now more likely that the modernists will suddenly discover that the Church has passed *them* by. If they do, we might well see the revolutionary tumult which normally follows the collapse of an ideological dream.

But many show no sign of awakening: we are still told how John Paul II's "narrow Polish background" impedes his effectiveness, disappointing theologians who "expected greater depth and sophistication." The *New York Times* recently discussed the future of the Church (and underscored Hitchcock's emphasis on the dominance of the therapeutic mentality in the "new"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Church by having the theological article written by a psychologist) in terms which celebrated the rise of "liberation theology," relied on John Updike for the definition of theology, and attributed the acclaim with which the faithful have received the forthright teachings of the Pontiff to his "winning instincts for public relations." (*Time* magazine also insisted on reducing him to a media-sized phenomenon, "John Paul Superstar.") The *Times* went on to tell of the "chilling effect" of Pius X's encyclical against modernism, calling it "a determined battle . . . against intellectual inquiry." No doubt James Hitchcock will one day be hailed as a threat to free thought—no modernist could read this book without experiencing the "chilling effect" of slightly sweaty palms groping for a response to one of the finest pieces of cultural analysis in years. □

Between Two Chairs and into Phonyland

Irwin Shaw: *The Top of the Hill;* Delacorte Press; New York.

by Lev Navrozov

Whenever it is said in New York that a good writer in the West today sells several thousand copies of his book and cannot live on it, while a hack sells millions of copies of his hackwork and is photographed in magazines with his new mansion or yacht in the background, those who contest the point mention first of all the name of Irwin Shaw. Here is an author who has been sitting on both chairs—the chair of selfless service to literature and the chair of lucrative mass-cultural deals.

I also thought this way when, once upon a time, a Moscow theater asked me to find and translate an American play. I read five volumes of the "best American plays" of the last half-century. Almost all the plays were unacceptable, not because Soviet censorship would not pass them (to the contrary: no Soviet censor would object to a single line of Lillian Hellman), but because they were parochial and/or boring and/or primitive and/or unprofessional (like Lillian Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine).* The only exception was a pre-World War II play, *The Gentle People* by Irwin Shaw. The author sat on the two chairs with ease and grace. A mass spectator could well take the play for a "thrilling," "exciting," "highly amusing" farce or vaudeville. A connoisseur could see its subtext of subtle, tragic poetry. Both could agree that the plot was unexpected yet spontaneous, the characters were typical yet alive, and the dialogue was revealing yet natural. *The Gentle People* defeated mass culture on its own battlefield and wed it magnanimously. It was a successful American hybrid.

Alas, it is not only a mass appeal that mass culture requires. It also insists that an author must publish a new book every year, or at least every two years—just like the apparel industry must come up with new models of shirts every season.

I realized this with horror as I talked with an editor from Scribner's. I told him that I was working on my book which had been published once before. "But what for?" he asked. "I thought that Scribner's would like to publish it." The tears of humiliation rang in his voice: "Do you mean that we would publish your *old* book?" It was exactly as he might have asked: "Do you want us to wear your old shirts?"

Books must be as brand-new as shirts. And this is where mass culture has caught up with Irwin Shaw.

Yes, here is a brand-new novel by Irwin Shaw. Please remember that I am an admirer of Irwin Shaw as he revealed himself in *The Gentle People,* for example. So I desperately tried to find *something* good about his latest, *The Top of the Hill,* which surely is brand-new.

Let us first suppose that 340 pages of the 346-page book have been mercifully torn out and destroyed. What would be left? Three pages at the beginning and three pages at the end. Neither the plot nor the content of the book would suffer as a result. Mike, a New York business executive, is tired of business (his audits lead to the firing of inefficient employees) and he loves mortal danger in parachute jumping or skiing. His wife objects to his derring-do. He leaves his wife, his business, and New York and settles in Green Hollow, a sports resort. The elderly owner of the inn where he stays also loves mortal danger. He skis off the top of a hill, breaks his leg, is about to freeze to death in the snow, yet he fights desperately for his life. This accident cures Mike of his love of mortal danger. He becomes a local hotel manager, and phones his wife in New York to come up to Green Hollow and give their marriage another try.

This six-page story would be published by *The New Yorker* with delight, though I wonder if *The New Yorker* editors themselves remember the short stories they publish. The trouble is that this six-page short story is *not* a hybrid of high culture and mass entertainment. It is neither of the two. It is brand-new old hat (since Hemingway, how many times have we heard about husbands smothered by their wives and proving their men-without-women independence via sports or hunting?), unconvincing, artificial, boring, and conventional. Yet into this six-page "nice *New Yorker* story" Irwin Shaw thrusts 340 pages of pulp.

Its only purpose is to convert a six-page "short story" into a 346-page

Lev Navrozov, a Russian writer and critic, now lives in New York.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"novel." It is filler, padding, waste paper. What is it about? Nothing. Or perhaps it's about certain irrelevant, desultory episodes in a country which we may call Phonyland.

In Russia many writers draw their propaganda novels not from life, but from previous propaganda novels. Not unsimilarly, Irwin Shaw draws these 340 pages from mass culture—bad Hollywood movies, pulp novels, sugary magazine stories.

In Soviet Phonyland a hero willingly sacrifices his salary to benefit society. In Irwin Shaw's Phonyland Mike, a New York business executive, knocks out someone's teeth—and never thinks for a second ("almost forgets") about the possible legal consequences of his action until the court summons is served to him. Everyone who lives in New York knows that this is as phony as a hero's sacrifice of his salary for the benefit of society in a Soviet novel. It is cowboys in Hollywood or television movies, not New York business executives, who never think about legal (or any other) consequences of knocking out someone's teeth.

All in all, compared with Soviet inhabitants (who are always under the burden of some invisible strain, often on the defensive for physical survival, usually ready to yell, grab, fight), Americans (except for criminals whom I have never seen off the television screen) strike me as hothouse orchids, Chekhov's Russians, gentle (oh yes, *gentle people*), trying to avoid even a trifling unpleasantness, and on occasion upset or reduced to tears by, say, a salesgirl's rudeness which a Moscovite would take for politeness incarnate.

Yet because of Soviet Phonyland, a large section of the world perceives the Soviet inhabitant as a gentle, law-abiding altruist; because of American Phonyland it perceives the American (e.g. a New York business executive) as a Hollywood cowboy, noble in his own way (Irwin Shaw's Mike interceded for a molested girl), but as oblivious of laws as a newborn baby.

There is one piece in this 340-page Phonyland that could be interpreted as relevant. Mike's childhood is sketched, explaining his love for mortal danger to prove his male independence. As we can readily guess, the explanation is that Mike's mother overprotected him. Irwin Shaw narrates an inverse morality story about a goody-goody boy and his evil mother. In a straight morality story, a goody-goody boy plays the piano, while a wicked good-for-nothing boy runs away and plays baseball instead. In Irwin Shaw's inverse morality story it is sinful, if not evil, to play the piano instead of playing baseball, or to "go on extended tours of museums and churches in France, Italy, and England." Yet this is what the evil mother imposed on her goody-goody son.

"The result was to be expected," Irwin Shaw concludes with sanctimonious triumph. "Michael was a fat, secretive, clumsy boy, melancholy and precociously bright in class" (the latter being also evil, of course). But Mike was a goody-goody boy. So he rebelled against evil things like good manners, began to fight and swear ("It was like a stream of pure music and he listened to himself marveling," exclaims Irwin Shaw with unctuous rapture) and thus turned into a handsome, slender (Hollywood) hero who can knock out a villain's teeth like a Hollywood actor does (on stage, of course, not in real life). "Sports . . . began to capture his imagination, such as skiing, surfing and sex" (sex as a variety of skiing?). Yet at the same time, he "won the first prize in mathematics" and was granted a degree *summa cum laude* from Stanford. The Hollywood skiing, surfing, sexing, fighting cowboy-mathematician combines beauty and nobility and strength and courage and intellect. A goody-goody boy has become a prodigy of Hollywood male virtue owing to his goodness and despite his evil mother.

It is inconceivable that Irwin Shaw does not notice how sickening, sugary, and infantile his (inverse) sermon or parable is.

All the other episodes filling the 340-page filler are irrelevant to the content of the book, unconnected with each other, redundant, and take place in the same Phonyland where a business executive knocks out someone's teeth and "almost forgets" about it.

In Phonyland, phony Americans eat and drink in expensive restaurants almost around the clock (the food and drinks are described with the elaborateness of a magazine gourmet column) and indulge (also almost around the clock) in what Russians call "African passions." This cardboard food-drinks-

Books in the Mail

Gustave Le Bon: The Man and His Works **edited by Alice Widener; Liberty Fund, Inc.; Indianapolis.** Some first translations and excerpts from the works of the 19th-century Frenchman who founded social psychology and made major contributions to physics and political science.

Democracy and Leadership **by Irving Babbitt; Liberty Fund, Inc.; Indianapolis.** A new printing of Babbitt's work, first published in 1924, on political and moral philosophy.

E Pluribus Unum: The Formation of the American Republic, 1776-1790 **by Forrest McDonald; Liberty Fund, Inc.; Indianapolis.** An examination of the decision to politically unify the United States.

Two Roads to Ignorance: A Quasi Biography **by Eliseo Vivas; Southern Illinois University Press; Carbondale, Illinois.** A personal analysis of the flaws and falsehoods of the philosophical naturalism of John Dewey and the dialectics of Marx.

Night Trains **by Barbara Wood and Gareth Wootton; William Morrow & Company; New York.** Set in a Polish town during World War II, this novel is based on a true incident involving the use of a fake typhus epidemic to hold back the nazis.

Shall America Be Defended? SALT II and Beyond **by Daniel O. Graham; Arlington House; New Rochelle, New York.** A look at the history of U.S. defense policy, the SALT II treaty, and its implications for the future.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and-"African passions" Phonyland is naturally peopled by handsome heroes and beautiful heroines.

Mike's wife (Tracy) is a beauty. As he leaves her and has never-ending love affairs (of course) amid magazine-gourmet-column food (to be sure) and drinks (how else?), every mistress of his is as beautiful as he is handsome: "He paid the bill and they got up and walked toward the door, the other men in the restaurant staring at her and the women staring at him."

As is typical of mass culture, Irwin Shaw's love scenes between the handsome hero and beautiful heroines seem to have been copied from previous, similar pulp:

> ". . . a certain expression in Tracy's eyes, an impatient twist of her head, her erect, straight carriage, the slender but voluptuous body, the satin feel of her skin . . ."

It pains me to ask the writer whom I once admired: "Mr. Shaw, have you known, experienced, observed, any *real* people in *real* love or anything *real* in *real* life, or is all you know just bad movies or bad television plays or previous bad novels?" Is there a woman (man or child) who would not have a certain expression in her (or his) eyes? An "impatient twist of her head." Her "erect, straight carriage." The "slender but voluptuous body." Good heavens. There is only one phrase that can match all that for banality, and this phrase is: "the satin feel of her skin."

Some thirty pages later another heroine has "slender but well-rounded hips and behind." Note that even a well-rounded behind is slender. In about 100 pages, still another heroine "was thin and angular," yet Mike saw that she was "full and rounded."

There are no women in *The Top of the Hill.* There is only one female Hollywood-television-mass-magazine-pulp-novel mannequin, and all Irwin Shaw can say about her is that she is neither bony nor fat (indeed, her well-rounded behind is slender).

Every episode of the 340-page filler is striking for its irrelevance and banality. Ten pages, for example, are suddenly devoted to Mike's and his father-in-law's sailing in a storm. (Apparently, Mike's father-in-law also seeks mortal danger to prove his male independence.) About as many pages are devoted to the story of how Mike was stopped for speeding and how he managed to get arrested because he gave smart Stanford University answers to the policeman's college-untutored questions: "Where . . . were you going?" "I was escaping." "Escaping from what?" "The old ennui." The hero and his heroines are all equally smart and speak the same smart language, in contrast to dumb policemen. Then follows the sugary story about a 16-year-old black waitress whom Mike helps to become a pop singer and a ski racer. Thrust into this 340-page mishmash is a certain shifty, ugly French cabaret pianist, a stereotype, or caricature, whose Hollywood vices set off the hero's Hollywood virtues. To enable him to pose as a skiing instructor, Mike compels him to fall down the stairs and pretend he broke his leg. The Frenchman complies, breaks his leg "for real," and several pages later he is hired as a cabaret pianist.

The dust jacket describes Mr. Irwin Shaw as a "lifelong athlete," and it might seem that he could at least describe skiing true to ABC facts. "He skied . . . on ice, always at full speed . . ." One cannot ski on ice at full speed. On ice, one usually has to pick one's skis up and carry them, unsportsmanlike as it may seem to Mr. Irwin Shaw. Even skiing is phony in Phonyland.

Some Russian writers of the 20's who showed a promise of genius became, in the Soviet propaganda environment, run-of-the-mill hacks. Evidently the American literary-critical establishment is quite potent, too, if it has converted the author of *The Gentle People* into yet another phony stuck so deep inside his Phonyland. □

For the Intelligent Noneconomist

George Reisman: *The Government Against the Economy;* Caroline House Publishers; Ottawa, Illinois.

by William E. Cage

If you have ever looked for a house in a strange town, tried to figure out why your car wouldn't start, or helped a fifth-grader with his "new math" homework, you know that knowledge is scarce—and valuable. In fact, when we need knowledge, we usually contact someone who earns a living by selling it. The real-estate broker knows what houses are for sale; the mechanic knows how automobiles run; the teacher not only knows the subject but also (hopefully) how to help someone else understand it.

The more difficult that knowledge is to obtain, or the more valuable it is in its uses, the more compensation it obtains in the marketplace. But there are some kinds of knowledge which are not even offered for sale, if for no other reason than it would be impossible for any finite group of people to possess them. A case in point is the knowledge required to effectively and efficiently manage the economy. Even with the high-powered computers available today, it would be impossible to allocate all scarce resources (labor, capital, etc.) to their best use. Even if we could list all

Dr. Cage is a corporate economist from Joplin, Missouri.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

possible uses of only *one* resource, changing tastes, preferences, and technology would all work to make our list obsolete in short order.

How, then, does an economy run? It runs—and runs efficiently—only to the extent that a market system is used to allocate resources. No government official, regardless of position or power, could efficiently allocate just one resource. No single businessman could make all the decisions necessary to run even a small business. In fact, as Leonard Read pointed out years ago, no one person knows how to make even a simple wooden pencil. The *only* way that pencils—and computers, cars, skyscrapers, and oil refineries—get produced is through the market system. Only the market, with its prices directing resource use, can economize on the knowledge needed to run an economy.

In *The Government Against the Economy,* George Reisman has set out to outline the basic operation of a market system. In 60 pages, he explains how the price system utilizes the knowledge of millions of people to allocate resources. The rest of the volume is taken up with explanations of how virtually every action of the government simply frustrates the smooth operation of the market. It is not difficult, after reading this short book, to conclude with Reisman that "a government which imposes price controls is in the process of destroying the economic system of its own country."

Reisman pays special attention to the various energy crunches which have been induced by government fiddling with pricing, profits, distribution, and the like in the energy industries. Most of this is well known to professional economists but seems to have escaped the attention of the citizenry at large and even of the business community. No one should be surprised that the U.S. increases its oil imports when the government slaps a price ceiling on oil produced domestically. There should be equally little astonishment that natural gas supplies declined where the price was controlled at $1.42 (per mcf) while the market price was $2.00. This type of information, supported with Reisman's careful logic, apparently needs to be conveyed to the lay public. Reisman's work is a good means toward that end, although the writing style tends to be academic and there is—in the Austrian tradition—a dearth of the type of empirical evidence that tends to convince a skeptical audience. I might fault Reisman for only a couple of things. First, he uses several pages to castigate media reporting on the subject of oil company profits. While the reporting has indeed been flawed, it is doubtful that it has been "dishonest," as Reisman labels it. I suspect the news reporters of all the media are simply innocent of the analysis of the energy situation. It would be easy to read into Reisman's discussion that the press has conspired to not report the "facts." But we do have a free and competitive press, and conspiracies are much less probable than simple widespread ignorance.

Second, Reisman calls for a restoration of the gold standard for our monetary system. He does not explain his conception of a gold standard, but to call for *restoration* of the gold standard implies the type of monetary system in existence prior to 1933. That system, however, was simply one in which the government imposed a price control on gold! By establishing a *fixed* price for gold, the government short-circuited the market. Such a system imposed a bit more discipline on the monetary authorities than now exists; but, as history has shown, the government will quickly sever any tie between "official money" and gold whenever people start bringing dollars to the Treasury in exchange for gold. The restoration of that type of gold standard would be no solution at all. It would be more encouraging if Reisman would let the market take care of the monetary needs of the economy. The past decade clearly demonstrates that the government (the Federal Reserve System, in this case) is incapable of satisfactorily meeting those needs.

For the purpose that Reisman had in writing *The Government Against the Economy,* he succeeds. If an interested person would take two or three evenings and work carefully through this book, he would unquestionably learn something of both interest and importance. This is, in short, a good, concentrated course in economics for the intelligent noneconomist. One should come to an appreciation of what economic problems really are and how the market system solves them. It is perhaps asking too much for a book of this nature to deal completely with the total concept of the economics of a free society. It is one thing to point out, for example, how price controls brought on the energy crisis. It is quite another thing to point out that the oil companies climbed in bed with the government decades ago, and that Exxon et al. should not be surprised to find that the hand that once fed them has now been turned against them. In fact, there may be some reason to believe that the larger oil companies favor the government's intervention because the price controls on domestic crude oil actually have a much larger impact on the smaller oil companies. Another area deserving some treatment is the foreign policy of a free society. In the waning part of 1979 we saw the U.S. government forbid the purchase of oil from Iran. Reisman correctly concludes that socialism *necessarily* breeds fear, mistrust, and hostility within a nation. Is not the same conclusion valid when governments intervene in economic trade *among* nations?

To return to the main theme of this work—that one of the worst things a government can do against the economy is to control prices—it is a message that indeed needs to be conveyed. As coincidence would have it, I received a copy of the National Council of the Churches of Christ Policy Statement regarding energy. While admirably filled with sincere statements of Christian concern, this statement comes out strongly in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

favor of increased government involvement in the energy field, even suggesting that energy prices be *kept* low as part of our national energy policy. That is analogous to a prescription for a pint of arsenic if a cupful didn't do the job. It will undoubtedly take more than Dr. Reisman's work to eliminate the ignorance which must be at the base of such suggestions, but we at least have in his book a significant contribution toward that end. □

Co-opting the Beat Generation

Dennis McNally: *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation, and America;* Random House; New York.

by Gordon M. Pradl

Soaring across his symbolic landscape of the American experience, questing for evaporated essences in the modern blade of grass, comes Sal Paradise, self-proclaimed reviver of those vanished visions that had once sprung out of that ego originally residing in the body of a Mr. Whitman. Halfway across America, Sal soberly confides in his readers, "I was at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future." Sadly, because it was a youth that never was, it is a future that never will be.

In *Desolate Angel,* Dennis McNally recounts the saga that was Jack Kerouac, alias Sal Paradise, peripatetic hero of the Beat Generation, *On the Road* savior of an uptight America. It is a tale of talent and of dissipation, of dreams and of nightmares, of community and of alienation. And it is a tale with a moral: Don't cross the liberal corporate structure or it'll eventually destroy you by buying a piece of your action.

Kerouac's beginnings in Lowell, Massachusetts set the themes for the restless journey of his life toward its own destruction. Of French-Canadian descent, he grew up an outsider to the rooted past of a New England community. His older brother, Gerard, died when Jack was only four, and Jack suffered much guilt at this loss, especially since he felt he could never approach his idealized image of Gerard that grew out of Gerard's saintlike behavior during a sickly childhood. With relief it was frequently easier for Jack to assume an opposite role of wickedness and rebellion, even if this role only appeared in fantasy. For while still in Lowell, Jack's public self bowed to the authority of the nuns who controlled his Catholic schooling. Yet the inner self, the unloved child, discovered the world and power of language, a power that Jack would eventually use in trying to awaken America to a new spiritual awareness.

Throughout his life Jack maintained a strangle-hold relationship with his mother. She was still a part of his household when he died, and yet he could never please her, convinced as he was that it was only Gerard that she loved. The unsatisfying nature of this primary relationship, along with the Virgin Mary context of the Catholic Church, served to poison his subsequent encounters with women. Although he was married more than once, he was never able to set down lasting roots with a woman. In more conventional ways, Jack was also a disappointment to his father, who, in the midst of his own career failures, had staked so much on Jack's succeeding in terms of the traditional American dream. Yet before he dropped out, Jack's conventional side did bring him as far as his sophomore year at Columbia on a football scholarship, and later, for all his supposed radicalism, Jack disdained the encroaching welfare state and espoused a patriotic "America First" during the red scares of the fifties.

The surprisingly conservative message of Kerouac's writing, despite its radical trappings, is really only understood when these frustrations, contradictions, and yearnings of his youth are made explicit. Without writing another glib psychohistory, McNally has given us enough background material and commentary on the early years for us to be able to see that Jack's ongoing sense of disorder and dislocation resulted largely from the unsatisfactory nature of his initial object relationships. In attempting to recover love and establish a youth that might reasonably extend into mature adulthood, Jack ended by becoming his own worst enemy. Because of his early hurts he ironically felt most potent in the role of his bad self, a self that undercut his continual cry for community and relationship by staying in perpetual motion on the road. For to get too close to others, especially women, was to expose the void in oneself. Yet the longing in his writing remained true to the central American vision of self-determination. The message soured, however, because the community roots of responsibility and predictability were never established. The merry band frantically roaming the countryside could never hope to sustain itself because it was not willing to commit itself to anything beyond the moment. And thus the dream of a new America literally drowned for Kerouac in the despair of alcoholism.

Alcoholism, Menninger tells us, is a defense against "internal dangers." Unable to solve the existential problems of living, unable to face the destructive elements of being, the alcoholic commits a convenient self-indulgent suicide, and this has profound implications for the substance of the art created by the alcoholic. It is just this connection between a poet's "ontological insecurity" and the manifest content of the created poems that has, for example, been explored by the critic David Holbrook in his

Dr. Pradl is Professor of English at New York University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

studies of Dylan Thomas. Like Kerouac, Thomas killed himself with the bottle because he was unable to resolve the hurts and conflicts of his youth. In *On the Road,* Kerouac unwittingly reveals this dilemma, "The one thing that we yearn for in our living days, that makes us sigh and groan and undergo sweet nauseas of all kinds, is the remembrance of some lost bliss that was probably experienced in the womb and can only be reproduced (though we hate to admit it) in death." Failing to resolve such an issue, there can be little hope for a future, or for an art that affirms, not denies, the realities of the human condition.

At first writing provides some means of relief for Kerouac, but increasingly it becomes a desperate howl calling for the death that will be the only release from the pain that existence has always provided for him. His writing at this point has the potential to seduce us by offering us false solutions to the problems of living, especially in times of instability and cultural fragmentation. We should, however, take a different stance and recognize that at least the writing can force us to come to terms with the complexities of existence. Although lost himself, Kerouac does put his finger on the key issue of our lives in a bureaucratic technocracy: How do we re-establish our own individual initiative? How do we regain responsibility for ourselves?

The literary generation that Kerouac helped bind together included names that still receive homage from the underground counterculture: Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, and Gregory Corso. Unbridled inspiration, not disciplined dedication, seemed to be their password. Loosely grouped under the "beat" label, the actual story of the commercial canning of the Beat Generation is a remarkable case study of how the dominant liberal culture can twist potentially legitimate protests for autonomy into the newest conforming fad.

By coining the term "beat" Kerouac had obviously set the stage for ambiguous interpretations. What he intended to encapsulate in "beat" was the sense of being in touch with one's original sources, of fulfilling one's own aspirations on one's own terms, independent of the baggage and protocol of consumerism. The intuitive life-force rhythms that made up black jazz provided the Beats with their key image, while reinforcing the mystique of improvisation and spontaneity. The raw energy, the rough edge of honesty cut loose by this artistic credo, which became indistinguishable from a frenetic lifestyle, is distinctly highlighted by Kerouac's thumbnail sketch of George Shearing, before and after: "Shearing smiled; he rocked. Shearing rose from the piano, dripping with sweat; these were his great 1949 days before he became cool and commercial."

Naturally enough the Beat credo posed a substantial threat to the literary intellectuals already concerned with the dissolution of the stable values that supported their hierarchically ordered version of society. The new critics, the false values of scientism bearing down upon them, had come to a curious impasse. By turning poems into aesthetic objects they were, as McNally relates, suggesting that "the study of art was superior to its practice." Art dominated by the academy was elitist art. "As a working-class Canuck, Jack didn't emulate the WASP values these high priests of culture certified." Thus when Kerouac's writing began to be published, the official reception was icy at best. His vitality was grudgingly acknowledged, but this, too, was finally discredited because the message could not be seriously entertained, nor the shapelessness easily pardoned.

What follows Jack's bursting innocently on the professional literary scene is one of the early instances of media lionizing, the voguish rush to define and become part of a new sensibility before it gets thrown on the trash heap of yesterday. And here was a sensibility that appeared to cast off the chains of social responsibility. Unfortunately, Jack's talent with words had never been transformed into a permanent craft. His stream-of-consciousness style was literally the result of marathon bouts of creativity, words flowing onto his sacred scrolls, the continuous rolls of paper speeding through his typewriter, rather than of deliberate daily discipline. Thus he was vulnerable to criticism and rejection, and as the liquor washed over him, the writer disappeared, replaced by a fearful public self, part truculent showman, part spoiled child. The reigning critical chiefs had extracted their revenge from an upstart who dared, like Walt Whitman before him, to suggest that the natural, untutored voice might again sing songs to the people. Yet without the secure roots of youth to sustain it, the unrestrained articulateness which Jack so valued had dissolved paradoxically into the cold sweat of inarticulateness.

But the final ignominy to be visited upon Kerouac's talent was the inversion of the term "beat" and of the artistic renaissance Kerouac had intended by the concept. Marketed through the slick efforts of the media mongers, "beat" in the popular imagination became synonymous with "beatnik." Kerouac's restless journey in praise of language and primary experience ended by being portrayed as the inarticulate, finger-snapping social dropout, perhaps best identified in the public mind with the ineffectual, and thus harmless, Maynard G. Krebs, costar of the *Dobie Gillis* show.

The writings of the Beats, of course, painted a brash, solipsistic reality completely at odds with the everyday life of the mainstream society. This played conveniently into the hands of those who would discredit them, especially because of their experimentation with hard drugs, their seeming disregard for any stable work ethic, and their open disrespect for all pronouncements of the academy. How easy it was to mis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

represent the mad dash for inner truth as a know-nothing attack on convention and rationality. Thus the Beats were held up to ridicule while at the same time their plastic image was safely being embraced in the slogans printed on endless T-shirts. In sterilizing the Beat protest, liberal culture once again established its inaccessibility, its imperviousness to intellectual dialogue from outside itself.

McNally's service is to have provided us with the information necessary to create our own significance of the life of Jack Kerouac. This despite the obvious hero worship on McNally's part: "I regard these alienated American prophets as my spiritual and intellectual ancestors. In a world that faces potential ecological and spiritual apocalypse, I respectfully submit that the legend of these psychic pioneers is necessary in order that we might understand our present reality." Clearly the rhythms and hyperbolic nature of Kerouac's own prose has entered McNally's veins, and thus we must contend with a continually overblown language: "In fact, there were only a very few threads in any level of the culture that were not part of the grey flannel weave." Or, "There was no escape from the pervasive fog of the technocratic culture. Rather, a trip such as theirs was like stepping off a cliff—and flying; ultimately their road led within." This posturing even reaches McNally's outward presentation of self, if we are to take his dust-jacket photo seriously—a hip, alienated young man hiding behind shades with just the right length of ash poised on the end of the cigarette extending from a carefully gestured hand. Seeing such images made me wish for a road map along with the text to plot out Kerouac's truly amazing number of transcontinental trips, or for a bar graph gallon count of the prodigious volumes of alcohol Kerouac is supposed to have consumed.

But beyond these excesses and blemishes lies the overarching value of the tale itself. In reliving the sorrows of Kerouac, McNally allows the reader a glimpse at the kind of malaise 20th-century man faces in the presence of a bureaucratic world that would deny him the validity of his own intentions. □

Perfectly Awful

J. P. Donleavy: *Schultz;* Delacorte Press; New York.

by Joseph Schwartz

Because each novel since J. P. Donleavy's first grew progressively worse, *The Ginger Man* now has a more imposing reputation than it deserves. It was good enough to begin with, but in contrast to what has followed, it appears, retrospectively, to possess virtues larger than its real values warrant. *Schultz,* Donleavy's eighth novel, will certainly contribute to this curious state of affairs.

Dr. Schwartz teaches English at Marquette University and edits the quarterly Renascence.

I think the question no longer can be, whatever happened to Donleavy's talent? Rather, I think, the question is, how did he manage to do whatever turned out to be memorable in *The Ginger Man?*

Schultz is perfectly awful; there is no other way of putting it. The only reason for reviewing it is to find something instructive in the failure, something that may have implications for the well-being of the commonweal.

Sigmund Franz (Freud?) Schultz is an American Jew, born in New England, and now an impresario in London's West End. He is not Donleavy's usual protagonist, the artist, or a juvenile novelist's conception of the artist. He is crass management, trying desperately to make money and to be accepted by England's privileged, rich aristocrats. Greed is the essence of his character. "Religion does not teach the only important truth there is, that man saves his soul by money alone and to be rich is right and true and from that derives all beauty and justice." Keeping one's balance at the top of a world which has at best a shifting foundation is the most one can do. But, managing that, "You can not only scratch your fanny but touch the moon." That, as they say, is having the best of both worlds. But count on nothing since "Life at best is just a Jewish joke." The sensitive reader need not be concerned over an incipient anti-Semitism in the novel. Schultz is Jewish only because Donleavy says he is. He is, in point of fact, a total zero. There are no characters in the book, only cardboard one-dimensional cut-outs propped up by the sheer will power of the author.

Schultz is, however, like Donleavy's other protagonists in that he is a womanizer with contempt for women. The women in his life are to be sure beautiful and willing, but also grasping and contemptible. They want everything from a man—his sex, his money, "his imprisoned proximity"—so that he won't have any "juice" left for anyone else when they are finished with him. "Give a little bit of yourself to a woman and they keep wanting more. Till they got all of you." Schultz dislikes and despises all of them, convinced that they are good for only one thing. Hence, one should not waste time with women when the end is not going to bed together. After observing him "walking about admiring his erection in his various bedroom mirrors," we are not surprised that he concludes, "Masturbation is the supreme form of sexual pleasure." He comes to this position, however, only after bedding down every woman within reach in situations as various as limited imagination permits: heterosexual-homosexual *ménage à trois,* heterosexual-lesbian *ménage à trois,* titled noblewoman, abused servant, privileged servant, starlets—each being more sumptuously

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beautiful and sexually kinky than the next. *Schultz* might well have been subtitled, "Suffocated by Sperm." On the other hand, that gesture toward ribaldry is taken care of in the name of the company Schultz hopes will bankroll him—Sperm Productions. The odd thing is that all these sexual hijinks are neither funny nor witty nor farcical nor angry, but instead dully pornographic and wearisome. Donleavy's creative juices, to stay with his argot, are dangerously low.

As a gesture to some half-remembered, earlier sensibility, willingly or by accident, Donleavy introduces some poorly thought-out, weakly articulated social commentary. The rich get the pleasure and the poor get the pain. It appears in the novel in much the same way that social commentary is used in obscene rock songs: sappy, pubescent, and puerile. The representative rich aristocrat is made to say that "Lurking in the psyche of the British upper classes is a strong desire to discipline the lower classes." Schultz, alas, is not only an American but a commoner, left to wish that he had been born an aristocrat, admiring the way they have life arranged. What Donleavy knows of the aristocracy appears to have been learned from magazine advertisements. In any event, this aborted motif is soon lost in the frenetic sexuality of Schultz and the others.

Yet, perhaps all of this trashy nonsense is made interesting by the writing, by some grace and wit which might cause the degenerate reader at which it is aimed to smile, to be titillated a bit. The following is a representative sample of the style:

> "This was Lord Nectarine's statement upon the occasion of his first meeting with Schultz. A winterish gloomy day of pouring rain. And drops were still rolling off a black curly Schultz's head, which had just hysterically rushed across half London by foot, bus and taxi to meet the rich peer."

What is one to make of Schultz's head rushing across half of London by foot? After the first few pages, the reader gives up trying to figure out why periods are used instead of commas. "He enjoyed to consult" is followed by "He enjoyed to stroll." After a good deal of this, I finally concluded that Donleavy is attempting to imitate the rhythms of Ring Lardner. (John O'Hara's *Pal Joey,* a Lardner spin-off, is also a candidate.) The model is, I think, *You Know Me Al,* those brilliant short stories done in the form of letters to Al. Throughout the novel Schultz is frequently on the phone with his pal, Al. Lardner, however, knew what he was doing in creating a realistic speech rhythm for a new social caste. Some immediately real character was created by the dialect, and it was, of course, Jack Keefe speaking. Schultz is not a character, and he is not the speaker of the novel. It seems, however, as if the narrator is trying to capture the tone of Schultz's voice without making him the speaker.

P. G. Wodehouse's ghost is also present in Donleavy's attempt to capture what he imagines to be the rhythms of British aristocratic speech.

> "Ah Schultz, early to work are you and as usual, taking up the seat of authority in the chairman's chair. And also as usual looking the worse for wear. Upon how many au pairs did you perform your rite of simulated procreation last night?"

Just as "Sigmund Franz Schultz" merely as name is supposed to send us into gales of laughter, so, too, the Wodehouse imitation of British names:

> "The marriage has been arranged and the wedding will shortly take place between Basil, the eldest son of the late Lord Nectarine, eighteenth Earl of Eel Brook Common and Lady Nectarine and Violet, youngest daughter of Admiral and Mrs. S. O. S. Clutterbutterbucks D.S.O. of Castle Cranpickity, Moss of Barmuckity, Scotland."

Jeremy Balthazar Bink Sunningdale and Lady Jane Pricklygorse are also married. The subtleties of Wodehouse coming to the reader through Donleavy is comparable to imagining Johnny Carson playing Molière.

What this novel adds up to can be understood from one scene. Schultz is returning clothes rented for a fashionable wedding but damaged as a result of an incident there. When told by the clerk that he must pay for the damages, Schultz goes on a rampage, destroying everything in the department. After paying 165 guineas for the damage, he is stopped by an observer:

> "I should like to firmly and warmly shake your hand. I've been wanting for years to do what you've just done in there. I simply never had the courage. Thank you."

The observer is supposed to represent the response of the reader. Schultz is our barbarian, the one we await, says Cavafy, to act out with his brute strength the outrages our timidity will not permit. To escape the demands of freedom and responsibility, the terrible burden of particularity, we imitate the desires of another. God(s) or heroes no longer link us to the universal; but unable to give up infinity we choose substitutes. Schultz is Apeneck Sweeney who makes "them" take crap full in the face. His jolly antics tickle us; his attack on the sacred provokes our secret vulgar guffaws. His inversion of our creed and code provides a new banner on which to fix our hidden anxious gaze. He is Saul Bellow's Rumkowski, the mad Jewish king of Lodz, out of the ghetto and in full majesty at the center of civilization. We smile at his blasphemy; but behind him, as Bellow warned us, stands the thug, and on his face there is no smile. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Commendables

A Convincing *Reglement des Comptes*

Philip Roth: ***The Ghost Writer;*** Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

This is a novel (actually a novella) about dilemmas. Big dilemmas, small dilemmas, and those peculiar dilemmas that fit neither category. It's about the impossibility of choices, which are neither small nor big but inexpressible and unsolvable to the extent that it's even impossible to form a judgment about them.

With this novel, Roth has reached a maturity which is unrelated to age. Such maturity crowns a writer's career and effort. No one, in point of fact, knows when a writer will reach this maturity —yet he and his critics know when he's finally there. *The Ghost Writer* displays some of the subtlest structuring of an infrareality in modern fiction. It achieves it by blending reality with subreality and hyperreality. It may sound abstruse, but it's quite obvious in this story about two writers and two women who together try to settle something so complex that it becomes simple. It has a delicateness of narrative tone which is rather new for Roth, hitherto a practitioner of assorted pungencies. □

Mr. Dimitrov of Bulgaria

Charles A. Moser: ***Dimitrov of Bulgaria;*** Caroline House Publishers; Ottawa, Illinois.

Professor Moser came to the attention of all friends of reason during the mid-60's. He had been teaching Slavic literature at Yale when he correctly pointed out in an interview that Russian poets of the Yevtushenko stripe are actually operatives of the Politbureau, if not outright tools of the KGB. Since that was exactly the time that the American liberal intelligentsia was melting with enraptured delight at the very sound of Yevtushenko's updated agitprop serenades, it was perhaps not surprising that he became a persona non grata. If this was a cause-and-effect, it is a sad commentary on Yale's commitment, under Chancellor Brewster, to intellectual freedom and independent scholarly inquiry.

Bulgaria is best known to most of us as the country into whose army Voltaire's Candide was incorporated by force. What makes Professor Moser, a man from Tennessee with the speech manner of Sergeant York (as played by Gary Cooper), get so deeply involved with Bulgarian literature, we do not attempt to fathom. However, *Dimitrov of Bulgaria* may shed some light on it. In it, Professor Moser has captured one of the fundamental dilemmas of that specific region of the world, known as Eastern Europe, where talented, noble, and far-sighted political idealists, who only wished to serve their countries with integrity and dedication, were forced to waste their lives in endless escapes from totalitarianism of either the right or the left. Mr. Dimitrov's is the classic story of an East European populist parliamentarian, leader of an agrarian party, who had to combat the evils of both nazism and communism—the archetypal situation for any East European statesman of decency, honor, and courage. Professor Moser tells it with an erudition and attention to detail which results in insights invaluable to anyone who wants to know something about Bulgaria and the Balkans, their history and their fate. □

Waste of Money

The Sharks

Bob Woodward and Scott Armstrong: ***The Brethren: Inside the Supreme Court;*** Simon & Schuster; New York.

Nixon had to go, whatever his deserts or failings, because the liberal establishment in the media hated him, for various reasons. It's natural that a Supreme Court featuring four Nixon appointees, including the Chief Justice, would elicit similar feelings from the liberal muckrakers. They have long seemed like sharks cruising toward blood in the water. Since the Warren Burger court has recently taken a stand against some of the more indecent transgressions of the so-called free press, thereby earning its hateful wrath, some kind of vendetta was inevitable. This book is nothing but rabid, unabashed revenge, adorned with the bogus righteousness of service to the republic. A massive effort to drive its message into the nation's consciousness is being made by the most powerful centers of opinion making, which smacks of ideological collusion.

Muckraking is called "New Journalism" these days, which makes it no less smelly; its intentions are simply veiled with a thicker layer of mendacity and false civic virtue. Its most potent device is a sort of "reconstituted-lemon-juice" style: the muckrakers simulate and counterfeit situations and conversations which they have never seen, attended or listened to, which they learned mostly from biased, often dishonest, informants, and which they peddle as reality. They are about as real as reconstituted lemon juice. Mr. Woodward is one of the most prominent exponents of the genre: to an unprejudiced eye, his "work" is no less than despicable. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Screen

A Big Bang and Small Change

Apocalypse Now; Directed by Francis Coppola; Written by John Milius; United Artists.

Starting Over; An Alan J. Pakula Film; Paramount Pictures.

10; Written and Directed by Blake Edwards; An Orion Pictures Release.

Yanks; A John Schlesinger Film; Universal.

Le Cage aux Folles; A Film by Edouard Molinaro; United Artists.

by Eric Shapearo

In the end, Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* makes an impression of mythology by computerization. All that we know about war, both emotionally and visually, everything we know about cruelties, instincts, and situations which previously has been registered by literature, art, journalism, has been fed into a computer—and a synthetic superwisdom with superartistic vision was supposed to emerge. Did it? It did not. Instead, the product was labeled a homage to Joseph Conrad.

A New York critic, respected though a bit unctuous, wrote, perhaps, *un mot le plus juste:* "For Coppola, as for a great many other film makers in recent years, anti-Americanism has become the last refuge of banality . . ." This was inevitable once the creation of myths, formerly the dominion of morally committed literature, turned into mythmaking, which gives to thriller writers or journalists an authority equal to that of artists. The literary phoniness of *Apocalypse Now* cancels its right to serious analysis or dissection. If *The Deer Hunter* was art, *Apocalypse* sponges on artistic impulses, intuitions, and intentions without bringing them into a distinct shape. The former tells something honorable and important (regardless of its accuracy) about man and history. Honorableness and importance are missing from Coppola's work; a detectable pursuit of them turns into artificiality and contrivance. *Apocalypse* tells us that war is blood, mess, and plenty of undeserved suffering—certainly a correct observation. But war has another dimension; it must have, or it would have been eradicated from the universal human experience millennia ago.

Thus, what we have here (again) is war as insanity and gore. And a suggestion that Vietnam, particularly, had unheard-of excesses of each. In the first hundred pages of *The Charterhouse of Parma,* Stendhal describes the Battle of Waterloo with the same literary premise. But he tries to find some method in madness. Coppola relies on drugged rock spirituality. Cruelty in his movie does not originate in despair, terror, fright, but in hysteria and frenzy. In such a rendition, lunacy and aberrations soon become boring—all the color and fireworks notwithstanding. The movie is empty, devoid of meaningful interhuman connections and dependencies—which are so poignantly throbbing in *The Deer Hunter;* motivations are either trite or befuddled, and there are plenty of synthetic TV-type tragedies around. A black sergeant, in a moment of utter grief, manifests his humanness with a dash of sensationalism which is perfect for use in an editorial. Yet, amid cartoon characters covered with blood and mud (which is *meant* to attest to their humanness and inner depth), he stands out like a monument of authenticity. Bizarre, impressionistic sentences float around ("Napalm smells like victory . . ."), but none of them attempt to rationalize politics, or, at least, military concepts—the precondition of any epic and descriptive literature or art which deals with war or politics. Why the American high command should wish to "terminate" a renegade who, after all, is busy killing the Vietcong, is a puzzle (according to Coppola: to avenge the death of a few South Vietnamese double agents—a motivation straight from the spy thrillers). Even if the facts might verify such a case, it hardly lends itself to an impressive metaphor.

And then—there's that Conrad stuff. *Heart of Darkness,* to which *Apocalypse* pretends to be a contemporary sequel, is about serious people and their serious matters. *Apocalypse* is about people who kill, wreak havoc, bring about suffering and annihilation—very serious matters—but who are not serious. Conrad wrote about the illusions of civilization, about the horrendousness of ultimate human impotencies. The Vietnam story, if it is ever told in literary and philosophical terms, must be about the abysmal convolution of a lie. Did we defend freedom and the right to self-determination, or did we just defend our own political stature—an allegedly abject reason for so much sorrow? To my mind, the great Vietnam movie or novel must come from exploring the ambivalences of what was happening on American streets and campuses, of the struggle that took place in the dank sewers of mass communication. America succumbed not to arms, but to the impenetrability, or perversion, of truth; the communists and their American helpers fought, not our soldiers, but our collective consciousness. This perspective does not exist in *Apocalypse,* nor does it have anything to do with Conrad. *Heart of Darkness* is a voyage into the substances which make human nature slip into metaphysical follies. *Apocalypse* is a voyage into war, a man's folly—a much simpler venture.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Conrad's Kurtz is a man who failed in a mysterious way: we cannot penetrate the profundity of his defeat for we are not subjected to his fate. Coppola's Kurtz is a sort of habitué of horror, and the word does not sound altogether inscrutable when he finally pronounces it. It sounds merely pompous and pathetic.

* * *

With that typical, darling, feminist insouciance for the teachings of history, *Ms.* magazine describes, quite gleefully, the recent rash of women abandoning and divorcing men as a *new* and legitimate phenomenon. It is as if Helen did not ditch Menelaus for another man, as if Emma did not dump Charles for "believing oneself other and better than one is," and as if Moll Flanders did not coolly run away from five legitimate husbands toward what can now be perceived as a legitimate vocational call. In *Starting Over,* the protagonist's wife kicks out her husband so she can pursue a career of writing asinine rock lyrics. Throughout the movie, however, we are not sure whether its creators are spoofing her, or if they consider her imbecilic dedication to platitudes a legitimate advance toward woman's destiny.

Starting Over is generally seen as a comment on America's sexual revolution. The latter, as the more sober among us know, is a contrived, hyped-up and mistreated social occurrence whose leaders, apologists, and bards in national magazines, on TV talk shows, and in academe want us to believe that before its outbreak babies came into being through distribution by parish priests rather than through a set of exertions known since the dawn of mankind. At the end of the 60's, at the outset of the "upheaval," a dimwitted radical clergyman, interviewed by *Playboy,* said: "One of the things we are discovering is that woman is *not* sexually passive . . ." The humanoids educated at Berkeley, supposedly the fathers of the sexual revolution, were discovering what Babylonian poetry already had dealt with in depth, but which *Time* and *Newsweek* hailed as the Second Revelation. These pathetic, half-educated "revolutionaries" became an unheard-of bonanza for the Madison Avenue spielers, the biggest in a long history of fleecing ignoramuses. The Berkeley ideologists claimed that before *Screw* magazine explained it in detail, children were a result of parthenogenesis, while carnal delights were prohibited by the Constitution, the FBI, Chase Manhattan (which was suspected of refusing mortgages to the sexually active), and Lyndon Johnson, who saw them as a threat to the war. Then, the darkness of feminism descended upon the nation and the learned female professoriat with a deviate bent declared that *any* sexual rapport was rape. Journalistic experts on libido and drives accepted this as gospel and interviewed leathery ladies who attributed this state of things to the male rulers of Mobil Oil, the Catholic Church, and the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association. Therefrom, a generation has emerged that tends to believe that man's sexual sensitivities are products of beef protein, Wheaties, and the military-industrial complex. Unspoken, sordid minitragedies plagued normal human beings throughout the 70's, and signs can be spotted that a new, earthshaking discovery by Betty Friedan and Hollywood will soon bedevil the mid-Manhattan collective mind: men *also* have feelings. The feminists' profound faith that masculine sexuality is made of cheap polyester—provided by DuPont and designed to facilitate the treatment of women according to the instructions of major corporations—seems to be slowly receding. With time, someone, perhaps, will come up with the mind-boggling discovery that Petrarch publicly wept because of Laura, Werther committed suicide because of Charlotte, and Theocritus kept reminding everybody that unrequited love was worse than a meteorological disaster.

Starting Over deals with these matters, but in an infinitely more clumsy, banal, shallow, and obtuse way than Petrarch, Goethe, and Theocritus. However, the very genuineness and warmth of the subject lends it a feeble cinematic glow which makes two hours in the movie house bearable.

* * *

If *Starting Over* tries to dabble in the falsifications endemic to the "sexual revolution," *10* deals with its sleazy results. It is a telephone comedy—an old Hollywood saying for a movie in which the telephone rings whenever the director and scriptwriter do not know what to do next. *10* is vulgar without being smart and stupid without being naive. It has a repulsive hero, puny-looking and dull, and a heroine who's supposed to be the ultimate in 1979 feminine pulchritude but somehow seems to be fabricated from cheaply varnished oak. Her spiritual equipment resembles that of a Pavlovian dog: whenever she hears Ravel's "Bolero," she's ready to perform sexually with whoever happens to be around, regardless of her marital status. The protagonist, who desires her madly, finds himself unable to realize his dreams when he finds out about her nondiscriminatory stance. His would be a morally edifying weakness except for the director's utter primitiveness in handling the story: the authors of the movie seem to wish to condemn the new sexual dehumanization and depersonalization, but they do it in such an inept and ambiguous way that most of the liberal critics wound up adoring the movie and defining the girl's attitude as "sexually relaxed." As the film oozes with sexual relaxation, and finally drowns in the heavy gravy of fleshpot trivialities, it can be safely assumed that the attempted message will be easily ignored, while American girls will try to look like wooden Barbie dolls and carry cassette recordings of Ravel in their bags. They probably will describe these little things as their moral crutches, or security blankets.

The director tells this tale in a slapstick style of hectic aimlessness: one gets an impression that nothing would make him happier than to have the Keystone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cops running around in the buff. As the hero is an "elevator music" composer, the score has been duly provided by Mr. Henry Mancini, the ultimate giant in the Muzak department.

* * *

Yanks is an aborted exercise in sentimentality on a singularly attractive and prolific theme: American troops in England, during World War II, preparing for D-day. One would assume that one of the most selfless war efforts in mankind's history, still largely unexplored in post-war literature both in its moral and emotional dimensions, would give animus to some exchanges of views pregnant with meaningful evaluations. No one pretends that animosities, jealousies, and abrasiveness, as well as inclinations and affinities, do not characterize the relations between common people fighting for a common cause and afflicted by the commonness of their human condition. Nothing of the sort comes out from the trudging of the director, Mr. Schlesinger. All we get is a differentiation of mores of a Baedeker insight and sensibility: American table manners, as opposed to those of the British, a different sense of space, routine differences in racial matters and attitudes toward the "coloured" people. It's uninspiring, often correctly observed, and amounts to nothing.

* * *

Le Cage aux Folles is a simplistic *boulevard* comedy made digestible by the oldest tradition of French farce. The French worked out this genre long before Molière: they knew how to entertain by quid pro quo—virtue is humiliated in the end, for it is actually bigotry, while vice reveals itself as bonhomie. In this case vice is two aging homosexuals. They are disgusting, pathetic, and vulnerable, but they do not pretend to be either an oppressed social minority or a social problem. They are faggots and queers and old drag queens; they think about themselves this way and address one another exactly in these terms. They do not ask for any special rights or fight for an alternate lifestyle. They do not ask for anything, in fact, and they apologize for their own aberration. They use every stereotype against themselves, which results in sophomoric romps and histrionics, and finally makes us like them and see them as warm, generous, beseiged humans like anyone else. This approach to farce—no social message, no consciousness-raising, just the crude magic of things human caught *in flagrante delicto*—is called by many the light French touch. It still works, even on the most worn-out merchandise. □

Music

Building Inspectors and Criticism of Music

Andrew Porter: *Music of Three Seasons: 1974-1977;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

by Tom Bethell

At first glance, the publication of these arcane pieces of music criticism between hard covers might seem puzzling. Twenty dollars is rather a lot to pay for a collection of columns which originally appeared in *The New Yorker;* they seemed pointless enough when they came out, and they strike one now as lacking even antiquarian interest. Eventually I concluded, however, that Farrar, Straus had experimented with an interesting variation on the Vanity Press theme. I estimate that a couple of thousand names (of performers, etc.) are listed in the index, and I suppose a good many of these can be expected to pay their $20. As one might expect, Andrew Porter is suitably deferential and polite about the music scene in and around New York.

Before coming to New York Porter was the music critic of the *London Financial Times.* He is immensely pleased with himself in everything that he writes. He seems to have never noticed that he has practically nothing at all to say about music. He disguises this, however, with a good deal of scholarly and historical reference, a smokescreen of trivia, proper names and textual allusions. Thus, he is forever telling us that (e.g.) when *this* work was last performed (in Prague) the soprano used a corrupt text in the adagio. But today at Tully Hall she used a properly amended score. It thus gives him "rare pleasure."

One of the things that Porter loves to say at some point in a review is what a pity it was that the lights were turned down, thus preventing him (and others of the listening elite who perchance were present) from following the score or libretto.

This places him in the Building Inspector School of music listeners. The building inspector is the man who trudges around the cathedral with his charts and his blueprints under his arm, making sure that the physical reality of the building conforms in minute detail to the specifications of the blueprint, worrying about the possibility of a warp here, a hairline crack there.

One thus imagines Porter marching into Carnegie Hall with the score under his arm. Throughout the performance, the score is monitored for possible discrepancies between blueprint and aural reality; such hairline cracks are triumphantly noted and conveyed the following week to *New Yorker* readers. The effect, of course, is to remind us, with a sharp nudge in the ribs, that Andrew Porter is a Grade A building inspector. In the end, Porter merely praises Porter.

Tom Bethell, Washington editor for Harper's *and the* American Spectator, *is the author of* George Lewis: A Jazzman from New Orleans.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is almost no evidence in this book that he is able to step back and enjoy the musical architecture. Possibly he can, but if so he can't write about it. He devotes a few pages to performances of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis,* two of the greatest works of Western music. Then, about Bach: "What can still be said about the *Goldberg* which is not summed up in Tovey's observations . . ."; and about Beethoven: "After the blaze of *Gloria in excelsis,* the composer's gaze drops to earth with the soft, low *et in terra pax."* Thus, the sad truth is that Porter is just one more illustration of the peculiar editorial fear that if the space devoted to criticism of the arts is filled by anyone other than properly certified building inspectors, then the reputation of the journal in question will be forever buried beneath a mountain of expert obloquy. There has historically been a strong element of intimidation here, of course—editors somehow have been bullied into believing that only music majors are "qualified" to write about music.

This is an absurdity, as we all know perfectly well. Historically the best writing about music—almost the only readable writing on the subject—has been done by amateurs: G. B. Shaw, Aldous Huxley, and C. E. M. Joad come first to mind. The most important thing to say about music is that it is ultimately completely mysterious. It is an analogy to another world which we fleetingly understand through the mysterious operation of this aural analogy. Beethoven's music is a particularly strong example of music as metaphor. The language of music which he deploys translates the emotional content of some other world into our world of fugitive sounds.

A redescription, in words, of this other world that the composer is trying to convey to us should be the ultimate task of music criticism. In fact, it is hardly ever attempted. (J. W. N. Sullivan, a mathematician, did attempt this in his very interesting book on Beethoven.) Writers and poets, who themselves have had some practice in the use of metaphor, at least have a chance of saying something interesting about music. Music school grads have almost no chance at all.

There is one remaining point to make: 20th-century classical music has been overshadowed by one event of predominant importance: the complete and total breakdown of the very musical language which earlier composers employed to transmit that other world into our world of sound. There simply is no longer any such language—merely an increasingly absurd avant-garde Babel. Contemporary classical music no more deserves the name of music than a succession of words randomly chosen from the dictionary deserves the name of speech.

The second most striking event in the history of 20th-century classical music is the widespread pretense among academic critics such as Porter that this destruction of the musical tongue has not occurred. *That,* of course, is why the academy has been so anxious to appropriate to itself not merely the performing but also the critical function. The danger is that if the amateurs, mere music lovers, were allowed to write criticism they might simply respond to the evidence of their ears with common sense and tell us what an incredible junk heap of pseudointellectual theorizing 20th-century "serious" music has turned out to be.

When such a breakdown of the critical function occurs, as has happened with modern music, it is as though there is a momentary vacuum—a vacuum which is soon displaced by a general inrush of gullibility. At that moment there appears on the stages of our concert halls and in the composing rooms of the academy a disreputable parade of charlatans and exploiters, more than willing to use to their advantage the pervasive climate of doubt and uncertainty. Andrew Porter lends a degree of legitimacy to this corrupt enterprise by having us believe that the interpretation of that grace note in the 32nd bar *really makes a difference.* He is thus once again reminiscent of the building inspector who set out to find hairline cracks and plumbing defects—in Hiroshima after the bomb had fallen. □

Keeping Time with the CLU and Other Thoughts

by Douglas A. Ramsey

When you are sitting in the midst of a couple of thousand life insurance agents and their wives listening to the New York Jazz Repertory Company recreate Louis Armstrong, and the audience begins clapping time, and they do it on the correct beats (second and fourth), you begin to suspect that something may have gone right with American culture. Twenty five years ago I sat in Jazz at the Philharmonic audiences largely composed of the jazz cognoscenti, and they invariably kept time (sic) on the first and third beats, a gross violation of hipness but one that was common in those days and, indeed, until recently.

Come to think of it, the mere fact of the New York Jazz Repertory Company or any other jazz band being engaged to provide entertainment for a conclave of insurance agents confirms that something in the collective unconscious has made average Americans feel the rhythmic essence of jazz, or at least has persuaded them no longer to regard jazz as a cultural embarrassment.

The site of this revelatory evening musicale was the Hyatt hotel in New Orleans, where the College of Life

Mr. Ramsey is a jazz musicologist from New Orleans.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Underwriters was holding its annual national seminar. The concert was replete with ironies and coincidences. Here in New Orleans, possibly the birthplace of jazz, a band of New York musicians had been imported to pay tribute to America's Mozart, the New Orleanian who virtually created jazz as a soloist's art. Why bring a crew of New Yorkers, none of them from New Orleans, here to summon the spirit of Armstrong? A convenient booking for the CLU, perhaps, because of previous contact with the NYJRC, or because Dick Hyman, the NYJRC leader, went after the business. Perhaps it was because the repertory company has in five years established a fine reputation with its skillful ensemble versions of Armstrong solos.

Nowhere in New Orleans, to my knowledge, is there a group of professional musicians who has shown an interest in preserving the letter of Armstrong's work. Whether there are musicians here interested in preserving the spirit of his work is the subject of debate among all levels and spectra of the jazz establishment in the city. Whether the city itself is committed to preserving its most famous son's memory is in doubt. The Armstrong Park project, on the site of the former Congo Square, languishes half finished under the administration of the first black mayor in New Orleans history. At any rate, it would have been interesting to hear at the CLU affair a band from, say, Preservation Hall performing an Armstrong piece. The contrast with the slickness of the NYJRC would have been, at the least, stark. New Orleans players of approximately Armstrong's vintage are unlikely to demonstrate much fascination with the challenge of reading or memorizing someone else's solos, even those of the master. The spirit of independence that made Armstrong artistically possible is still abroad in the city, although not matched with his genius. It exists in younger musical generations as well, even among those not directly involved with jazz. The rock and soul performers who develop here but must go elsewhere to flourish are Armstrong inheritors. Listen closely to Dr. John, the Nevilles, the Meters, and you will find Louis in the phrasing.

Under the assumption that no one trumpet player can equal Armstrong, the NYJRC assigns his recreated solos to three. Played in unison, harmonized, and given group dynamics, the masterpieces, ironically, often take on less dimension rather than more, like butterflies pressed between plates of glass. But when Bernie Privin, Jimmy Maxwell, or Francis Williams steps forward for his own solo or to play obligatos behind Carrie Smith's evocations of Bessie Smith, the spirit of Louis fills the room, as if he were cheering his successors and scoffing at an arranger's attempt to capture his soul on paper.

But Hyman's work is admirable. It has brought Armstrong's classic solos into the ken of people who otherwise would never have heard them, and it has recalled his blazing talent to those who might have begun to forget. Combined with film clips of Armstrong reminiscing and with snatches of his recordings, the NYJRC's program is a sort of portable museum, a musical Freedom Train dedicated to the glories of a major American artist. The insurance agents and their wives loved it, as they should have. But until recently who would have dared to predict they would sit still for it?

As the trumpet trio and Hyman, at the piano, were repeating the astounding 1928 improvisations of Armstrong and Earl Hines, not fifty yards away Hines was playing the first set of the evening in Le Club, the Hyatt's jazz room. At 74, Hines is, if anything, an even more ferociously experimental creator than at 23, when he and Armstrong blew the lid off the bottled-up possibilities of jazz soloing with "Weather Bird." Much of Hines's evenings are devoted to paternally backing his sidemen and his protegé vocalist. He smiles engagingly, sings occasionally in a style composed of legato and gravel, and solos sparingly. He shows unflagging and apparently genuine interest in the efforts of his sidemen when they are soloing, urging them on and rewarding them with public praise, "well done, young man, well done." It is fine entertainment, and often more.

Then, Hines constructs a cathedral. It may happen during one of his stock items, possibly "St. Louis Blues" or "Rosetta," or it may come in a piece he hasn't touched in 20 years. Rummaging in the basement of the keyboard, applying rococo layers of chords in the middle and a lightning scattering of tenths on top, erecting arythmic passages that somehow continue the beat, taking pauses that suggest a gliding eagle surveying possibilities, Hines is in full cry, eyes closed, head back, grimacing in intellectual strain and the ecstasy of creation. Possessed of a tone with the brilliance of polished metal and fingers with the speed of pistons, he indulges himself in the surprises he loves: runs, curlicues, doodads, pizzazz, castles in the air, tension, release, single and multiple explosions, harmonic excursions into unknown territory, and feats of metric foolery. Conversation stops, and the noisiest drunken life underwriter is compelled to listen. Other pianists look anxious; this is clearly impossible, and the impossibility has nothing to do with technique. That is why there has never been a Hines imitator. The imitation would have to go beyond notes. The most meticulously written transcription could not capture the joyous rage, the abandon, the whimsy.

Hines is of an era when jazzmen assumed that their obligation was to entertain. Talk of artistic matters makes him nervous, and he appears not to understand when his music is discussed in terms of art. His club dates and his concerts are designed to entertain, and they do. But at some point in nearly every Hines evening, he unveils his continuing artistic growth, all but un-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

precedented for a septuagenarian in jazz. Even Armstrong had stopped developing long before he reached his seventies. But Hines shows no sign of diminishing powers. No mere charming survivor, he can scare the hell out of you with his creativity. A giant is among us, still. □

Correspondence

Letter from London: Theatre

by Francis Donahue

As for theater, London remains the imperial city. Nowhere else is there such a concentration of playhouses offering a continuous banquet of theater fare. Nowhere else is there such a distinguished stable of playwrights actively supplying the national stage—Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, David Storey, Peter Shaffer, Alan Ayckbourn, John Osborne, Simon Gray, and others. Nowhere else is theater-going such a refined art.

In speculating on why the theater dominates the London cultural scene, one answer keeps echoing—Shakespeare and his legacy. In no other literary or artistic genre does one individual so outrank his fellow practitioners. To the question "Who is the world's greatest painter?" several answers are possible: da Vinci, Rubens, Cézanne, van Gogh, Picasso. In music the answers might be: Beethoven, Wagner, Mozart, Verdi. In the novel: Cervantes, Balzac, Tolstoy. And in the theater: Shakespeare.

Britons are justifiably proud of that supreme man of the theater. Accordingly, the theater in Britain begins with Shakespeare; students grow up on Shakespeare, study him, perform his works; actors hone their skills on his lines; audiences know, appreciate, and patronize the Bard's works year after year. And this dedication to Shakespeare is accompanied by an open-minded interest in other dramatists. London playgoers, with experience and perceptivity, are quick to recognize new talent. They also display an endearing respect for the past, which explains why revivals of major works of earlier vintage regularly find their way to London's stages.

The current season reaffirms London's claim to be considered the world's theater capital. An array of plays has lighted up some 40 playhouses in the West End (London's Broadway), a dozen playhouses on the Fringe (equivalent to off- and off-off-Broadway) and two publicly financed playhouses: the National Theater, with its three active stages, and the Aldwych, where the Royal Shakespeare Company holds forth. The season's centerpiece, as usual, was Shakespeare. More than a score of major productions were staged in or near London.

The tragedy of the year is *Antony and Cleopatra,* an account of middle-age romance at its summit. Peter Brook, Britain's leading director, gives the play an incisive production, focusing on the sensual world of the principals and playing down the wars and machinations of Octavius Caesar. This is, to be sure, Antony's play for it is chiefly concerned with the struggle of a man of state caught in the vise of a hoary dilemma: love versus duty. From the opening lines the outcome is never in doubt:

> "The triple pillar of the world transformed into a strumpet's fool."

The Shakespearean comedy of the year is *Love's Labor Lost,* staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company and dealing with the King of Navarre and three of his courtiers, who resolve to convert their court into a rural "Academe," where they will study, fast, and foreswear all contact with women. When a comely French princess comes by, accompanied by three ladies-in-waiting, the king's plans are sundered. Four couples soon pair off, and the women trick their suitors into making vows of love to the wrong lady. The playful, courtly wooing continues until news arrives of the death of the King of France. The ladies must depart, but they promise to accept their suitors as husbands after a year's waiting period. The Company captures and sustains the arcadian tone of this artificial comedy with its ornate language, combats of wit and probable satire on a philosophical "Academe" to which Sir Walter Raleigh belonged.

The most intriguing new play comes from Tom Stoppard. Known for his wit, originality, and vaulting intelligence in such plays as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Jumpers,* Stoppard has broken new ground with his acerbic play *Night and Day,* a conventionally crafted work tackling a contemporary theme: freedom of the press. The scene is Kambawe, a former British colony in Africa, where the new ruler, President Mageeba, is a dictator cut from the same cloth as Idi Amin. The country is in the throes of a civil war, and flying in to cover the action is Dick Wagner, a gruff Australian newsman. Wagner stops by to visit a British mining engineer, with whose wife Ruth he had recently spent the night in London. The three are soon joined by a young, idealistic British journalist, Jacob Milne. Before long the battle is joined: sharp exchanges ricochet across the stage as the two newsmen on foreign assignment debate the responsibility of journalists. Old pro Wagner has become comfortably complacent about his own professional ideals, while young Milne proves an ardent defender of press freedom. Ruth interrupts the debate to give her opinion, "I'm in favor of a free press, it's the newspapers I can't stand." Even Mageeba happens by, and he offers his

Mr. Donahue is the author of The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams *and teaches at California State University.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

own definition of a free press: "One that is edited by one of my relatives." When Wagner hints at another one-night stand, Ruth replies:

> "A lady, if surprised by melancholy, might go to bed with a chap, once; or a thousand times if consumed by passion. But twice, *twice* . . . a lady might think she'd been taken for a tart."

The mood turns somber when news comes that Milne, while covering the fighting, has been machine-gunned to death. Bemoans Ruth:

> "He died for the women's page, and the crossword and the racing results!"

But the most telling reaction to Milne's death comes in these lines, clearly reflecting one-time journalist Stoppard's own view:

> "Information is light. Information in itself, about anything, is light."

While the two newsmen shape Stoppard's argument on press freedom and responsibility, it is Ruth (film and TV star Diana Rigg) who dominates the play with her wondrously expressive voice, her bitchery, and, above all, her incandescent presence.

Harold Pinter's new play drew mixed reviews and should be seen from two angles: for more than a year he has been working on a film scenario for Marcel Proust's classic novel *Remembrance of Things Past,* and he admittedly has been living since 1975 with biographer Antonia Fraser, who is not his wife. His play is called *The Betrayal* and deals with adultery. It is structured progressively backward, beginning with the final scene—a requiem drink between two ex-lovers in 1977—to the abandonment of the London flat where they used to meet furtively in the afternoon, to a scene in Venice where the Husband informs the Wife that he knows of her affair with his Best Friend, to the renting of the flat originally, and finally to the party where Wife and Best Friend met in 1968. The story between those dates—1968-1977—involves a series of betrayals. The Best Friend is married and is cheating on his wife; the Husband too has been seeing other women. But the main betrayal concerns the Husband and the Best Friend. After the Wife betrays her Husband with the Best Friend, the latter comes to feel betrayed too, because the Wife did not tell him that the Husband had learned of the affair in midpassage. Pinter unfolds his plot slowly and with dry wit. He proceeds by dramatic inference, as is his custom, and he employs small talk which rings true ("Don't get upset . . . there's no point . . . I've always liked him . . . Yes, I thought that"). At no time does he glamorize the affair, revealing instead that infidelity leads to emotional bankruptcy.

Heading the murder-mysteries are three veteran works by Agatha Christie: *The Mousetrap* (now in its 27th year on the London stage), *A Murder Is Announced,* and *Murder at the Vicarage.* Joining these are two new mysteries by American playwrights, which have drawn very favorable critical reviews. In *Deathtrap,* a thriller which is also a satire on thrillers, playwright Ira Levin has his hero Sidney Bruhl describe the perfect murder-mystery:

> "Two acts, one set, five characters, a juicy murder in Act I, unexpected developments in Act II, sound construction, good dialogue, laughs in the right places, highly commercial."

Sidney Bruhl is a middle-aged writer of stage thrillers who has lost his touch, and who sees a chance to recoup when a former student in his seminar sends him a script that is a sure hit. Sidney upsets his wife (who has heart trouble) with serious talk of doing away with the student in order to send the script off as his own. The student is invited up to Sidney's Westport, Connecticut home for the weekend. A murder is committed—or is it?

Paul Giovanni, the second American playwright, brings Sherlock Holmes out of retirement in *The Crucifer of Blood,* a highly theatrical thriller based loosely on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of the Four.* From its initial setting in Delhi at the height of the Indian Mutiny (1857), the action moves ahead 30 years to London's 221B Baker Street. Holmes, Dr. Watson, and Inspector Lestrade quickly become involved in the mystery of a stolen treasure. Dialogue is crisply Victorian and there is a blood oath, as well as poisoned darts, an atmospheric opium den in Limehouse, a rousing lightning storm, and a pulse-escalating chase with Holmes and Watson in a police launch in eerie pursuit of the culprit on a fishing vessel on the fog-shrouded Thames.

Among the many classic revivals of the season, a standout was *A Fair Quarrel* (1616) by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, a tragicomedy set in Jacobean England and concerned with the honor theme. Captain Agar is insulted by the Colonel, who claims that he is the son of a whore. The Captain, fanatically honor-conscious, reaches for his sword, but then decides to delay responding until he can talk with his mother. The latter, fearing her son will be killed in any ensuing duel, admits falsely that the charge is true, hence her son is not justified in dueling. Later, when the Colonel insults the Captain

Persuasion At Work—Vol. III, No. 1, January 1980:
"THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY SHOOTING ITSELF IN THE FOOT AGAIN"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

again, calling him a coward, "the quarrel is now fair," for there is legitimate cause for a duel. Serving as a counterfoil to such honor in high places is a subplot involving two plebeian characters, a hulking Cornish wrestler and his servant, who, in imitation of their superiors, strive to learn a type of "roaring" (fanciful insulting) in order to pick their own quarrels in style.

England's leading comic writer, Alan Ayckbourn, lent his usual light satiric touch to *Bedroom Farce* which, after a successful run at the National Theater, moved over to a West End playhouse. Ayckbourn sets the action in three separate bedrooms side by side on stage, with action fading in and out from one bedroom to the other. Three interlocking marriages fall victim to a maladroit fourth couple who keep popping in and out of the bedrooms, trying to patch up their own impossible marriage and, in the process, bringing ludicrous discomfort to the three sympathetic couples. Characters are one-dimensional, the welter of action provokes uncomplicated laughter, the pace is rapid—it's a farce. The unifying element is protagonist Trevor, a teddy bear of a man with a gift for messing up his own and his friends' lives. Yet he remains supremely confident that he will be able to fix everything up if only he can get together with his latest victim and "communicate" with him or her. Although he never really succeeds in "communicating," he does manage to send the British audience home in a lively mood. Which is what a farce is all about, at least in a theater. □

The American Proscenium

Rock Music in Cincinnati

The Who, a rock group, did not stop playing as eleven bodies lay in front of the Cincinnati concert hall where they were performing. If those victims had been casualties of even a nearby traffic accident, a sense of tragedy and respect would have demanded silence and a dimming of the glowing light of festivity. It would have—in another time and another culture. In the culture spawned by The Who and their liberal admirers, such gestures of humanness and civil sensibility are superfluous. *Time* magazine has rewarded The Who with a cover story in which they are extolled as husbands, fathers, and multimillionaires. Those who were trampled to death by The Who's fans are of lesser importance to *Time.* Concerning the next day's concert in Buffalo, one of The Who said, according to *Time:* "If we don't play tomorrow, we'll never play again." Judging by the tone of apology and glorification which suffused *Time's* paean for The Who, this would have been a threat to Western civilization.

Like most of the liberal media, *Time* blames the tragedy on concert promoters, lack of police supervision, the greed of the rock operators who wanted to pack as many people as possible into Cincinnati's Riverfront Coliseum. We blame it on The Who's music—violent, cynical, destructive, overtly contemptuous of any moral and social norm. This kind of music creates a cultural climate in which cruelty, idiocy, and inhumanity flourish, and people turn into mindless beasts under the pretense of emotional elation and gratification. "The excess they want, group and fans together, is a release, an explosive culmination of energy . . ." *Time* praises The Who and their "art." Its writers and editors seem unable to make any cognitive connection between the idealization of "release" and eleven dead bodies. *Time's* delight and subsequent promulgation of the "excess" and "energy" of The Who exonerates the group from any guilt by association. This makes *Time* an accomplice in the entire sociocultural process which promotes psychic obtuseness in the face of tragic death, this society's abused civilizational standards, and its recklessly exploited youth.

The fact that, after what happened, only one city has canceled The Who's appearance is a civic calamity which proves that American municipalities and their mayors are the helpless pawns of cynical rock promoters who would step over any pile of youthful corpses to get to their Rolls Royces and Malibu beach houses. Some of the mayors expressed fears that cancellation could lead to riots. Such moral atrophy, or cowardice, must sooner or later affect the very fabric of a lawful society. The fact that neither the Department of Education nor the Baptist White House has anything to say about it is another appendix to the dissolution of moral commitment on the part of those who are supposed to lead this country.

But sooner or later it must dawn on this society that the rock subculture is a dangerous, bloodsucking parasite. Its practitioners reap material rewards out of any proportion to economic sanity; they turn the market system into an ignoble parody. Its egomaniacal, illiterate heroes, subhuman by any criteria known to us, wallow in riches which cancel any notion of ethics. Rock managers and hustlers violate any measure of societal rationality and rectitude.

Emotionality of and fascination with popular music are nothing new. Grand Opera used to cause political mass demonstrations in 19th-century Europe. Jazz and swing moved huge crowds to rapture. The crooners of the 40's made teen-age mobs swoon. Early rock generated stormy turbulence. But people began to be killed only when rock music degenerated into a drugged throbbing and a total denial of civilized bonds during the infamous 60's, when allegedly human amoebas in all the Fillmores and Woodstocks began to pulsate with the help of hi-fi technology, while their glor-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ifiers, like *Time,* declared that the sounds they made were music, poetry, art, rebellion, expressions of trammeled, invaluable instincts. The corpses of those who were trampled to death, knifed, shot, or who just O.D.'ed on drugs began to mark this trail of cultural "progress." And nothing indicates that it's ending.

Finally, this last episode shows that the word "expiation" should be deleted from the English vocabulary. The Who, or others of their ilk, will participate, directly or indirectly, in events which could have lethal consequences, and not for a moment will it occur to them or their followers that people should atone for their deeds. After all, Senator Kennedy was implicated in the death of a human being, but he would not do penance for it by withdrawing from public life, where he should be an exemplar. Decency of feelings, once called redemption, has been smothered by the liberal culture.(LT)

Polish Joke

Women's Wear Daily, whose editors believe that a see-through blouse is Western civilization's top accomplishment (as if they were unaware that some tribes in New Guinea are far ahead of them in being *en vogue*), interviewed Mr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's national security adviser, on fashionable topics. Asked about what he was thankful for on Thanksgiving, Mr. Brzezinski answered gracefully and modestly:

> "I'm thankful for myself because American security is in safe hands."

This was said in the middle of November 1979, when fifty Americans with the status of diplomatic immunity were being handcuffed, blindfolded, and mistreated in Teheran. Mr. Brzezinski's wit and tactfulness surely impressed the *WWD* editors, those arbiters of elegance and sophistication. □

Journalism

The *Lincoln Review*

by Allan C. Brownfeld

For years, the assumption has been widespread that skin color determines political, economic, and social points of view. A black, this common wisdom has told us, is inevitably to be found in that sector of the political spectrum which supports government intervention in the economy, expansion of the welfare state, increased power and influence of labor unions, and a foreign and military policy which defers to the demands of domestic spending and governmental growth.

Evidence is mounting that this assessment could not have been more mistaken. We encounter in the public arena more and more black intellectuals, business leaders, and political activists who have rejected the narrow and confining box into which they have been placed. Finally, a quarterly journal which represents this budding body of thought has appeared.

It is called the *Lincoln Review* and its editor is J. A. Parker, a successful black public-relations man who has long been active in conservative political circles. Mr. Parker served as assistant to the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity under President Nixon, and his public-relations firm represented the new Republic of Transkei, the African state which achieved independence from South Africa in 1976. He is the author of a critical biography of Angela Davis and is the co-author of a book about blacks and crime.

The first issue of the *Lincoln Review* appeared in the spring of 1979 and included a cover story about General Chappie James, one of the most inspiring examples of black nonconformity with the liberal culture's black stereotype. It also featured an article by black economist Walter Williams, of Temple University, discussing how minimum-wage laws have resulted in racism by keeping the unskilled work force out of the market. Labor unions, he argues, are "liberal" when it comes to advancing welfare-state philosophies, but narrowly self-serving when it comes to keeping blacks out of the competition.

The *Lincoln Review's* second issue included an interview with the black superintendent of the Washington, D.C. public-school system, Dr. Vincent Reed. Dr. Reed calls for a return to basic education, traditional skills, discipline in the classroom, and an end to "social promotion." He says: "We went through a decade of saying to youngsters, 'Do what you want to do. They know what they want, let them do it.' It has proven that they don't know what they want. They need some guidance and for years they've been crying out to us adults to tell them about life and where they might want to go . . ."

In response to the *Lincoln Review,* a black columnist, Clay Perry of the *Milwaukee Journal,* wrote: "The first issue of *Lincoln Review* is impressive . . ." Economic columnist Louis Rukeyser wrote in his syndicated column: "A remarkable new group of black intellectuals is posing the first serious threat to the notion that blacks should be a permanent, monolithic left-wing force in the American economy . . . The *Lincoln Review* . . . recognizes that what blacks truly need is what all Americans need: greater economic opportunity, vigorous economic growth, a curb on inflation and excess government generally . . ." The *Wall Street Journal* editorially described the *Lincoln Review* as "a new magazine with something important to say about the future

---

Mr. Brownfeld is on the staff of the Lincoln Review.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the black community in the U.S."

With a new and growing conservative intellectual movement in the black community, the monolithic stereotypes of the past have become irrelevant as, in reality, they always were. Subscriptions to the *Lincoln Review* are $12.00 annually. The address is: 1735 De Sales Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. □

Antitoxin

Accuracy In Media, Inc. is a social body of whose existence most Americans are unaware. History books, however, may reserve a spot for it as the first sign of national awakening from that pernicious nightmare which many today call the media age. The truth is that the free press has been transformed during the last half-century from a vital and healthy agent of American democracy, once seen by Jefferson as the guardian of *all* freedoms, into a monstrously manipulative, quasi-totalitarian ingredient of our culture. Its impact on public life, indeed, on all of Western civilization, has become negative, often disastrous. Thus, it was inevitable that society would develop an antitoxin, and AIM seems to fit the role. Its leaders, Messrs. Murray Baron and Reed Irvine, are redoubtable polemicists whose talents exceed their recognition—thanks to the blackout imposed on their names and achievements by the liberal media establishment. But their message, slowly but steadily, is seeping through the journalistic censorship.

In November 1979, AIM held a national conference on the roles and responsibilities of the media in a free society. Many resounding names from the world of journalism and its critics were at hand, and it could be observed that many of the latter had been recruited from the ranks of the former—a phenomenon known to students of moral reform as the primary substance of human progress. Two of them deserve notice. Mr. Uwe Siemon-Netto, a German journalist, social democrat, editor, and former war correspondent in Vietnam, represented uncompromising verity, penitence, remorse. In a highly emotional address, he stunned his audience by putting into frightful perspective everything he knew about the American and Western press's cheating, lying about, and misconstruing of events in order to assure the victory of ruthless, criminal, totalitarian communism. His impassioned pessimism about our future, if we continue to tolerate this kind of sociopolitical disease within our democratic organism, made everybody in the room feel gloomy and helpless. He failed, though, to explain, *why* the American press desired the triumph of antihuman red despotism, but he was amply aided in this respect by a previous presentation by Mr. Seymour Hersh, the notorious (or infamous) *New York Times* reporter who first broke the story of the My Lai massacre and muckraked the CIA. If Mr. Siemon-Netto reflected evil which had seen through itself, experienced contrition, and become light and virtue, Mr. Hersh personified an evil which immensely enjoys its own wickedness and ugliness and intends to stay that way forever. He told his astonished listeners that the media he serves live only by "hell-of-a-story" ethics, and that he does not care about the consequences—moral, social, or political—of this stance because, according to his interpretation of the First Amendment, he's absolutely unpunishable, not responsible for anything, and "the bottom line is that it's up to *us*. And that's the way it is. I'm sorry if you don't like it . . ." He means that the system is all his and we can stuff ourselves with scruples, responsibilities, ideas of duty, integrity, and fairness until we choke on them, while he has a good time. Mr. Hersh thus became, unintentionally, the highlight of the conference; rarely has there been such a public display of the American press's self-admitted arrogance, iniquity, recklessness, and depravity. To an unprejudiced eye it seems as if the entire heritage of Western thought is wasted if, ultimately, it has produced the bestiality of Mr. Hersh's mind and has endowed him with the *New York Times* as a loudspeaker, fully protected by current interpretations of the Constitution.

Polemics & Exchanges

The ACLU and the Conservative Impulse

by Henry L. Mason III

The ACLU's defense of a proposed demonstration by a group of American Nazis in Skokie, Illinois, has produced an extraordinary amount of misunderstanding. Although feverish diatribes could have been expected from liberals (among whom confusion is pandemic anyway), they are much less excusable when the source is a conservative who should know better. A case in point is Dr. Clarence Carson, who in the September/October issue of this journal accused the ACLU of "twisting" the Constitution in order to uphold an alleged "right of groups to use intimidation to get their way." That no such "right" was asserted, much less upheld, is obvious to anyone who will take the trouble to read the opinions of the Illinois Supreme Court and the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit.

The facts of the case were simple enough. A small but provocative Chicago organization styling itself the "National Socialist Party of America" announced its intention to hold a public demonstration in "storm trooper" uniform in front of the Village Hall in the largely Jewish suburb of Skokie. The

Mr. Mason is Director, Vice President, and General Counsel of the Illinois Division of the ACLU.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

proposed "march" was intended to protest a Skokie Park District permit ordinance requiring $350,000 in liability and damage insurance, and was to include—not speeches or handbills—but the display of placards bearing such slogans as "Free Speech for the White Man" and "Free Speech for White Americans." The Village was advised that the demonstration would take place on a Sunday, would include less than 50 people and would last approximately thirty minutes. Although the Village made no claim that the demonstrators would commit any acts other than a peaceful parade with the placards described above, it nevertheless sought a court order enjoining the proposed demonstration. In addition, the Village hastily passed a series of civil and criminal ordinances which in substance: (1) prohibited demonstrations "on behalf of" political parties by persons wearing "military-style" uniforms, (2) forbade the distribution of literature portraying "lack of virtue" in, or inviting "hostility" toward, persons or groups "by reason of reference to religious, racial, ethnic, national or regional association," and (3) imposed an insurance requirement as a precondition to obtaining any kind of an assembly permit.

The Village's actions were as ill-conceived as its ordinances were sloppily drafted. The first ordinance, prohibiting political gatherings by persons in "military-style" uniforms, would have equally condemned "among other things, an appearance by members of the American Legion in support of the candidates of the Democratic or Republican parties." The second would have prohibited not just racial epithets (ironically, it would apparently *not* have restricted the signs the Nazis proposed to display), but would have barred the circulation in Skokie of such things as the Bible, the *Merchant of Venice,* Churchill's wartime speeches denouncing "the Hun," and Greek newspapers condemning the Turkish occupation of Cyprus. The insurance requirement, which effectively imposed an impossible burden on groups sufficiently unpopular or controversial to be able to comply, was conceded by the Village to be unconstitutional.

The Village's request for an injunction was based on the theory that Nazi symbols were *uniquely* beyond the protections of the First Amendment. Both the State and Federal Appeals Courts ultimately rejected that claim as inconsistent with repeated decisions of the United States Supreme Court. The Village's further claim, that its citizens would be subject to "psychic trauma" if the demonstration were held, was equally unpersuasive for the simple reason that nothing compelled the inhabitants of Skokie to either attend or witness the proposed march. From the foregoing recital it should be abundantly clear that the Village's actions were constitutionally untenable. Any conclusion to the contrary would in fact have been appalling—*no* community in this country can arrest the flow of ideas, however controversial or even odious, by claiming special sensitivity, however sympathetic. Otherwise we would rapidly disintegrate into a crazy-quilt of Balkanized enclaves where *any* aggrieved group is legally free to exclude from its boundaries the ideas, literature and even the symbols of its historic antagonist. There has been not the slightest recognition of these consequences by either Skokie or its supporters, a staggering shortsightedness which is particularly contemptible in light of the fact that Belfast alone is sufficient warning on the point.

The involvement of the ACLU, moreover, was just as inescapable as the constitutional points it asserted. Disgraceful as it is to relate, it would have been impossible for a private lawyer to accept the case without risking economic destruction, a fevered situation which the press (with a few honorable exceptions) did little or nothing to cool. If the constitutional points were to be made at all it was the ACLU which had to make them, and the fact that its staff attorneys continued calmly to do so, in the teeth of gross public misunderstanding, savage personal abuse, and repeated physical threats, is an example of personal and professional courage not commonly encountered.

Conservatives who use the Skokie incident to heap abuse upon the ACLU are accordingly wholly misguided. Despite the ACLU's preponderance of liberal personnel and its occasional excesses of zeal, the stand it took at Skokie was a profoundly conservative one. Throughout its history the ACLU has thoroughly understood, with the same icy clarity displayed by the framers of the Constitution, the institutional *incompetence* of the government to determine ideological orthodoxy as well as its constant itch to do so. It has equally understood, and combated, the eternal impulse of the bureaucrat to ignore or trample the rights of the citizen —particularly the unpopular one. And throughout its history the ACLU has shown much less tendency than most conservative groups to contrive ideologically congenial but sophistic justifications for unconstitutional conduct —to catch the devil by cutting down the law.

Finally, the correctness of the ACLU's conduct has been amply confirmed by later events. Despite the fact that its arguments were upheld in their entirety by the courts, the Republic did not totter and the Fourth Reich failed to arrive. Quite the contrary, it was the Nazis who flinched and refused to appear, displaying in this respect considerably less courage than the black six-year-olds who walked through abuse and hatred to integrate the country's schools. And because the Nazis' self-proclaimed "constituency" has not the slightest difficulty in recognizing cowardice, it is hardly surprising that the Chicago band of cardboard Hitlers has now returned to obscurity. The enduring legacy of Skokie is the memory of a gallant and successful defense of the rule of law, and it is high time for conservatives to realize that in conducting that defense the ACLU was fighting *their* fight. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rockford College Institute
Rockford College
5050 East State Street
Rockford, Illinois 61101

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED